

# A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

EDITED BY A. NORMAN JEFFARES

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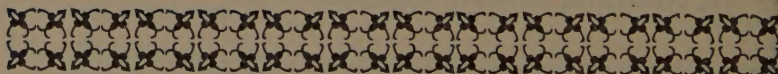
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VOLUME TWO    NUMBER FOUR    OCTOBER 1961

EDITOR: A. NORMAN JEFFARES

*Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds*

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## *Editorial*

LITERARY histories are unfashionable among schoolmasters and university teachers, yet at the first rustle of one stirring in the forests of untyped paper the publishers eagerly prepare their baits and nets and perseveringly push pieces of eight into their ancient muzzle-loaders. The general reader is often right, and it is a good thing that the tune he calls is one the publishers heed. At any rate, they pursue their authors or potential authors of literary histories and publish them. And some of us are very glad they continue to do this, for the literary history, provided it is written by a man of catholic taste, verve and scholarship, has many virtues.

These virtues can be recognised more readily—and perhaps because of the presence of their opposites—when the field is smaller than that of the whole of English literature. For instance, the need for good literary histories is becoming apparent in Commonwealth countries, where what is wanted is often detachment on the part of the author. He has to avoid the old-fashioned feeling that Commonwealth literature must necessarily be inferior to that produced at the centre out of a long and rich literary tradition, yet on the other hand he has to avoid a kind of new-fangled nationalistic brashness, to eschew the apparently ever-tempting search for the great novel or epic or drama of his people. A position on the perimeter has both advantages and disadvantages.

The disadvantages are those imposed by the absence of a large reading public for local literature, which is served by many critical journals which assist both writer and reader. There are, however, signs, indeed proofs rather than portents, throughout the Commonwealth that these disadvantages—the absence of a body of informed criticism, the smallness of an autonomous audience and the occasionally restrictive provincial nature of a local literary tradition—are diminishing. There are many new

journals, often superbly produced, which give creative writers the kind of informed critical background they need in an eighteenth-century activity of bringing literature out of the coterie into the coffee bar. This is part and parcel of a world-wide process of learning to use leisure in a more civilised way, and, like the activities of Addison and Steele, it may sometimes seem perhaps a little self-conscious, just a little priggish in fact, but none the less its total educational, informative impact is very important indeed.

The advantage of being on the perimeter is that one is less liable to be affected by mere modishness, by the coterie, by the multiplicity and immediacy of the centre. A certain sifting goes on, in time and through space, and this sifting now means that one point on the perimeter may be as near or nearer to another than it is to the centre. Comparison, that often neglected basis of literary judgement, may be easier, more fruitful if it is aligned in new ways. And there are signs that this is not unnoticed at the centre, which is itself increasingly revitalised by looking outwards instead of inwards. The centre is learning to be less dogmatic in its approach to writing on the perimeter (this issue includes an English critic's views of an Indian novelist); the perimeter sees its own problems paralleled elsewhere and takes a larger view of its own successes and failures (this issue also includes a Canadian critic's views of a Canadian novelist).

A recent publication, *The Commonwealth Pen* (1961), gives evidence of the state of writing on the perimeter and this collection of different viewpoints is most useful: the book also gives a potted historical introduction to the development of writing in English within the Commonwealth. (We badly need, of course, more informed work on, and translations of, say, French Canadian or Xhosa literature.) There are also welcome signs that we may expect urbane and interestingly written literary history to emerge more frequently in future. Here, Mr. Eric McCormick's recent *New Zealand Literature* (1959) points the way to others elsewhere—and to those publishers learning their knotting and topping their powder horns.

A. N. J.

# *Timon of Athens* *and its Dramatic Descendants*

G. WILSON KNIGHT

DURING many years of concern with *Timon of Athens* both in literary commentary and on the stage,<sup>1</sup> my respect for this remarkable drama has been maintained. Of all Shakespeare's plays it is the most obviously prophetic. Like Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* it is a money-play, though its effect has been far greater. It has had many descendants.

*Timon of Athens* shows its noble hero: (i) as a rich, warm-hearted and generous patron within a glittering society, but when his resources are gone and he is refused assistance by his former friends, as a man deeply angered by human ingratitude; (ii) as a naked prophet of social denunciation and cosmic speculation in the wilds by the sea into which, as into a vast 'nothing' or Nirvana, his story dissolves; and (iii) after becoming the possessor during the final acts of gold dug from the earth, as a being sought after for this and for other more magical reasons by emissaries from his native city which is being threatened with destruction. These themes are reworked by later dramatists.

The first is Richard Brome. In *The City Wit* a formerly generous but now penurious hero is confronted by ingratitude and employs a variety of intrigues to turn the tables on his society. Phrases are redolent of Shakespeare: Are 'open hands' and 'bounty' to be 'rewarded thus'? 'Is, to be honest, term'd to be a fool?' As in Shakespeare we are reminded that all things, in both nature and human society, 'rob each other'. That may be, but for man there should be other laws:

<sup>1</sup>Earlier discussions have appeared in *The Wheel of Fire*, 1930; *Christ and Nietzsche*, 1948; *The Sovereign Flower*, 1958. For the staging, see *Principles of Shakespearian Production*, Pelican Books, 1949, VI; and also my 'Dramatic Papers', The Shakespeare Memorial Library, City Library, Birmingham.



Now they all shall feel  
When honest men revenge, their whips are steel.

In *A Jovial Crew* Brome attacks society from a vagabond and nature-planted viewpoint thoroughly Shakespearian. He covers much of *Timon of Athens*; subsequent dramatists usually concentrate on a part.

In the eighteenth century interest falls on the social and financial aspects. Gay's *Beggar's Opera* attacks a society made of people who, when your wealth is gone, are ready with advice but 'shift you for money from friend to friend'. Fielding's plays are nearly all on a *Timon* wave-length. Lord Richly in *The Modern Husband* holds a *Timon*-like levee and we are duly warned as in Shakespeare against flatterers and false friends; Boncour in *The Fathers* pretends to be ruined in order to test his faith in human nature; and the poet Spatter in *Eurydice Hiss'd* has composed a drama on the *Timon* pattern of flattery, disaster and desertion of friends. There is a levee just like *Timon's*.

The concentration grows. Society in the eighteenth century was deeply concerned with the handling of money and its attendant temptations and risks; gambling, in play after play, is a major problem. We have next a number of warmly conceived but extravagant young men who are brought up sharply against the facts of human nature, especially friends who vary with the winds of fortune, as in George Colman the Elder's *The Man of Business*. In Richard Cumberland's *The Fashionable Lover* the extravagant hero is criticised by the Apemantus-like Mortimer and *The West Indian* introduces us to a brilliantly conceived young colonial from warm Jamaica whose generous and uninhibited instincts are comically at a loss in puritanical and money-greedy London. The generosity of Young Honeywood in Goldsmith's *The Good-Natured Man* meets a sterner judgement. Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* follows the central tradition, the hypocritical Joseph's stinginess when he is tested like *Timon's* friends being placed in vivid contrast to Charles's instinctive generosity. Such callous refusals are the theme of Mrs. Inchbald's *Everyone Has his Fault*. In Thomas Holcroft's *The Road to Ruin*

the good-hearted gambling hero when trying to save his father's firm from the ruin to which his extravagance has contributed is shamelessly turned down by one whom he had formerly helped to make a fortune. Holcroft's *The Man of Ten Thousand* reads like a deliberate rewriting in modern terms of Shakespeare's opening acts. Dorington's extravagance is criticised, his ruin follows, friends, as he was warned by his Apemantus-equivalent Curfew, prove false. All this he accepts with a delicate irony. He has all the time known what he was doing on the principle 'do good and receive good'. The play might have been composed to demonstrate that Shakespeare's hero was not so foolish as he looks. We are glad when Dorington gets his fortune back.

The formula grows tedious. However, George Colman the Younger's *The Heir at Law* and *John Bull* offer interesting variations on greed, false friends and ingratitude, with an emphasis on goodness of heart among simple people and its absence among the sophisticated; and *The Law of Java* contains strong satire against an avaricious imperialism. During the nineteenth century Dion Boucicault's satire on money in *The School for Scheming* has pith and originality, but D. W. Jerrold's *The Golden Calf* is mainly a *Timon* rehash, and despite its reputation and some technical brilliance much the same might be said of Lord Lytton's *Money*. Wealth, ruin—pretended or real—flatteries, and false friends; it becomes hard not to regard these as a worn coinage, if not a false currency. James Albery's *Two Roses* is saved by its wit.

None of these dramas contests the social system itself. They are concerned simply with an individual's use of his money. The kindly Sheva in Cumberland's *The Jew* prefers the helping on of two young people to leaving his money to any institution, believing that it is better placed with an individual of proved worth. This does not render them out of date; money means power and whatever our social system there will always be opportunities for the individual to choose between selfishness and generosity.

We turn next to plays corresponding to Shakespeare's final acts, wherein his hero assumes what might be called a 'Promethean' stature. If our last mainly satiric group may be labelled

'Augustan', our new group will be 'Romantic'. Timon in his natural stronghold forecasts many heroes of the Romantic movement. There are a few earlier links. In the seventeenth century the embittered hero of John Crowne's *The Ambitious Statesman* rejects the court with a Timon-like scorn of contemporary, and especially militaristic, valuations, and imagines himself growing into a scarcely human creature of lonely anguish in the wilderness, like Molière's Alceste in *Le Misanthrope*. In the Augustan period John Home's *The Fatal Discovery* has in the remorse-stricken recluse Orellan a figure closely corresponding to Crowne's suggestion, living like Timon among howling winds by the angry sea: 'The coot, the cormorant, are his companions.' The severance from society may be impelled either by a guilt or by a sense of superiority; sometimes we have a complex of both. Among the dramas of the Romantics M. G. Lewis's *Alfonso, King of Castile* has in Orsino a fine descendant of Timon, wrongly suspected of treachery by his friend the King and now living in a rugged setting of rocks and waterfalls. His first speech, moving from social repudiation to an embracing of wild nature, follows a speech of Timon's closely, and like Timon he is implacable to persuasion. Hate is now his only consolation:

And would'st thou rob me  
E'en of this last poor pleasure? Go, Sir, go,  
Regain your court! resume your pomp and splendour!  
Drink deep of luxury's cup! be gay, be flattered,  
Pampered and proud, and if thou can'st, be happy.  
I'll to my cave and curse thee.

George Colman the Younger's *The Law of Java* has another embittered recluse, once wronged by a friend and now living among great mountains:

Well—let our globe of peopled perfidy  
Roll on, while here I ruminate.

Mary Russell Mitford in *Otto of Wittelsbach* has another. So has Matthew Arnold in *Empedocles on Aetna* with its hero ruminating on society's persecution of great men 'in fierce man-hating mood' before plunging into the volcano. Protagonists die, but the theme



is undying; it recurs in Bernard Shaw's old sea-captain, Shotover, in *Heartbreak House* condemning a derelict and vicious society in the name of sea and sky; and in James Bridie's medical genius in *The Switchback* who, after being unjustly thwarted by the vested interests of the British Medical Association, when their attitude changes refuses like Timon all compromise, and sets out for the desert to find eternal life.

The theme may be handled less sensationally, as in the great-hearted Cumberland's *The Wheel of Fortune*, wherein the wronged and misanthropic Penruddock, after years as a Timon-recluse living close to nature, comes into a fortune with power over his wronger's family; is tempted to act coldly; but after a severe self-conflict proves, unlike Shakespeare's Timon, magnanimous, though he rejects the garish falsities of his inheritance and returns to his cottage and nature.

The young Byron acted the part of Penruddock. As we might expect, Byron's own dramas are both relevant and inclusive. *Werner* has a speech on riches of Shakespearian affinity; *Sardanapalus* is a grand-scale development of trust and generosity brought up against base ingratitude; and *Manfred* is our supreme dramatic document of romantic severance, having a hero, like Sophocles' Oedipus in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, at once more guilty and more righteous than the society above which he towers, playing out his destiny on the mountain heights; though, taking Byron's life and work as a whole, we shall regard the sea as his more instinctive retreat. T. L. Beddoes left two unfinished dramas, *The Second Brother* and *Torrismond*, in each of which there is a figure of riotous indulgence like Sardanapalus and Charles Surface, and in one of them an embittered person, like Penruddock; the two aspects of *Timon of Athens*, bright and sombre, Augustan and Romantic, being to this extent covered. Our whole story is given a visionary pointing in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: Zarathustra on his mountain with his loved beasts delivers a gospel that goes far towards interpreting our strange succession of subversive dramas.

We come now to our third *Timon* theme: the gold Timon digs

from earth. Just as such seemingly dissolute heroes as Shakespeare's Hal or Byron's Sardanapalus must when tested prove themselves better soldiers than their antagonists, so the great-souled bankrupt must regain his gold; either by a normally devised happy ending or symbolically. In Shakespeare the gold has strong symbolic radiations: it maintains and even increases the protagonist's stature; he is still sought after and despite his scorn of it, this 'yellow, glittering, precious gold', if the stage nuggets are properly devised, casts over Timon's retreat a semi-magical lustre.

The lonely Timon with his new gold corresponds to that other outcast in Shakespeare's other money-drama, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock's wealth is as his soul, Antonio all but pays his friends debt with his 'heart', and Portia's status as fantasy queen is supported by her possession of infinite riches. Both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens* revolve on the relation of wealth to more emotional, or spiritual, issues. Sometimes money-gold may be used to symbolise what we may call 'the gold essence'. Such gold may function dramatically as the individual's stronghold, one with his lonely integrity and furthest quest, like the symbolic 'gold' of Flecker's *Golden Journey to Samarkand*.

That is why miserliness can have so powerful a stage impact. Molière's *L'Avare* touches a serio-comic sympathy deeper than satire; and in the nineteenth century we have two peculiarly interesting studies. The semi-Christian Jew Reuben in Tom Taylor's *Payable on Demand* is a financial genius with a passionate love of his coins:

Gold, Lina—gold of all countries and coinages—doubloons—pillar dollars—spade guineas—louis d'or—Napoleons. The pretty goldfinches—they all fly London way, Lina. Dip thy hand in, child—isn't it pleasant? I love to feel their smooth, hard, glossy faces under my fingers.

Reuben is forced to an agonising sacrifice; the conception is noble, and its nobility in part depends on what is sacrificed, for our stage sense of Reuben's worth has lustre from this glittering hoard. Our second study is W. S. Gilbert's *Dan'l Druce, Blacksmith*. The embittered Dan'l, whose love has been poisoned by

treachery, lives like Timon by the sea, refuses compromise with those who come to reclaim him and concentrates in pathetic miserliness on his winnings as a mender of nets:

Ay, brother, I love my gold as other men love their bairns; it's of my making, and I love it, I love it . . . See, here's another day to thy life, another inch to thy height; grow as thou growest, child, and thou'lt be a golden beauty ere long. Gold, the best thing in the world; 'as good as gold'—why, it's a saying; the best thing on earth to make a bairn of . . .

Shakespeare is clearly behind the conception and this particular speech may assist our understanding of Timon's new-found gold. Such lonely possessions act on our minds as imaginative projections, or symbols, of the protagonist's integral power.

In medieval alchemy the quest of the Philosopher's Stone was associated closely with the Elixir of Life. The alchemists sought as fact what we believe as metaphor. Riches are certainly in economic terms a way to health and life; but far more universal, and independent of systems and currencies, is the metaphoric use of gold or jewels to point some transcendental, as against the biological, order, or reality. What is this higher 'reality'? It may be called 'power', in the Nietzschean sense; a power as yet only glimpsed, and that fitfully.

Goethe's *Faust* traces a development from medieval alchemy through Renaissance art and avarice to capitalism and a war made lurid by the 'mountain mine-folk', gnomes who have been earlier, in the *Masque*, described as digging gold and iron from earth and as kindly to the good while tempting bad men to crime and slaughter. The industrialist's power-quest in Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* is related to the prisoned metals crying to be mined and singing for joy when released. Minerals mean power, expansion, rivalry and conquest of nature. Modern industrialisation is a gigantic and living metaphor expressing man's will-to-power in all its glory and its danger. Both the excellence and the glory are active in Wagner's cycle *The Ring of the Nibelungs*.

In Shakespeare the metallic wealth is dug from the earth close by the sea; in Goethe and Ibsen it is dug simply from the earth; in Wagner it comes from a river. The Rhine-Gold is stolen by



the dwarf Alberich who makes from it a ring which is to give its owner world domination if he renounce love. It passes from the dwarf to gods and from gods to giants, stirring rivalry, a symbol of modern communities in greed-begotten strife, following Timon's:

O thou touch of hearts!  
Think thy slave man rebels, and by thy virtue  
Set them into confounding odds, that beasts  
May have the world in empire.

The gold is finally returned to the Rhine, as Timon at one point means to return his gold to the earth. What is our general conclusion? The gold-essence is itself sacred; in myth and legend, as in Wagner too, gold may be guarded by a serpent or dragon; its effect on man is intoxicating and arouses conflicts, though exactly what it is and what is its proper use and purpose, remain dark. Our best way to elucidation will be through a close study of the gold-symbolism in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*; or of the ambivalences in Oscar Wilde's extraordinarily subtle use of jewels, on which he is our greatest literary expert, in *The Young King*, *The Happy Prince*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salome*.<sup>1</sup>

A striking use of gold in its dual aspects occurs in John Masefield's *The Tragedy of Nan*, which develops a strong contrast of greed and sordid money—'little yellow round things'—as against emotional integrity and the angelic 'Gold Rider' who impinges victoriously on the tragic action. Though the story has no precise correspondences, *The Tragedy of Nan* might yet be called our most deeply Shakespearian drama in the tradition. The satire of Clemence Dane's *Adam's Opera* is on a *Timon* wave-length. In O'Casey's dramatic coat of many colours, gold signalises his best.

Our confusions may be forgiven since, though money may be the root of all evil yet the gold-essence, the 'golden secret' of *Manfred*, is the goal of all that is best in man; and yet we cannot quite say that the two are independent of each other. Bernard

<sup>1</sup>These will be discussed further in a forthcoming reissue of *The Christian Renaissance*.

Shaw's extraordinarily acute diagnosis of human economics never forgets that under our present system money exists as a positive, demanding respect. The outward and material forms, or mechanisms, of human traffic must somehow be attuned to an inward and spiritual, but intensely *individualistic*, grace; the individual's integrity, his gold-essence or sovereignty, must at all costs remain undesecrated. This is the theme of Wilde's *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. In it we are close to the meaning of *Timon of Athens*, to the reason why Timon's society implores his return, and to the answer to all our social discontents. Only so can our earthly existence become truly symbolic, or sacramental.

Shakespeare's drama has exerted a strong appeal on creative writers. It was adapted by Thomas Shadwell in the seventeenth century and by Richard Cumberland in the eighteenth. Pope used, or rather misused, the name 'Timon' in one of his *Moral Essays*. Timon was, not surprisingly, in the mind of Swift. Kean played the part, aptly enough, in 1816, the year Byron left England. Hazlitt thought that *Timon of Athens* was written 'with as intense a feeling of his subject' as any of Shakespeare's plays. Herman Melville for his own purposes coined the term 'Timonism'; and Dostoievsky, I have been told, regarded it as his favourite Shakespearian play. What the gloomy Tennyson thought of it I do not know, but the bitter passages of *Maud* are in the direct line. Lytton composed a verse-narrative of some weight entitled *The New Timon*. Today the American poet Robinson Jeffers lives out the destiny of Shakespeare's hero in his rock-built stronghold on the California coast.

Byron's life, with its fierce currents of genius and generosity forced to expend themselves in exile, has a *Timon* structure. He sensed his destiny from youth. In the original text of his *Childish Recollections* he was already seeing himself as a Timon 'not nineteen'; in one of his prefaces to *Childe Harold* he defined the poem's original intention as 'the sketch of a modern Timon'. After a period of social adulation he suffered financial collapse with bankruptcy followed by ignominy and rejection, and left England to find solace among the mountains of Europe and a

haven by the ocean, in the sea-city, Venice. When in Italy he could refer in one of his letters to his 'cave', as a matter of course, without further explanation. And he took a new, at times almost miserly, interest in money which had become for him a spiritual force, to be expended for Greece.

Not unlike Byron's, the drama of Oscar Wilde falls into two parts corresponding to the two halves of *Timon of Athens*. From flamboyance, social dominance, generosity and conviviality he passed to the endurance of ostracism and ingratitude. Lavish expenditure and bankruptcy are part of his story. While in prison he surveyed, bitterly, his financial entanglements, the insincerities of friendship, the shams of civilisation and the tragic meanings of his severance; being now, as he tells us near the end of *De Profundis*, more at home—like Timon—with 'the great simple primeval things such as the sea'.

*Timon of Athens* is written as from the heart of Shakespeare's genius. Its very roughnesses are the signature of a too-personal sincerity. In W. B. Yeats's *The King's Threshold* the poet Seanchan, denied his place on the Council, refuses, like Timon, to come to terms with the authorities when they, like Shakespeare's Senators, are brought to realise the state's need of the virtue it had slighted. Seanchan is Timon in a modern context. For, deeply understood, Shakespeare's play is far more than an economic extravaganza. Writing in an aristocratic age when patronage was one with poetry and great men were aureoled with splendours hard for us to focus, Shakespeare has transmitted through Timon his most cherished dream of human worth, stating that Promethean theme for which poetic genius, in every age, exists; recording that generous and golden overflow which meets in every age, or seems to meet, disaster. *Timon of Athens* measures the disparity between the great soul and his fellows. The human link proves false, snaps, and projects the superman on his way, friended by vast nature and the unknown. Too late society abases itself, wooing and cherishing what it had previously scorned, as Oedipus and Timon and Seanchan are wooed, in tardy recognition of the magic, the salvation.



# *The Retrograde Genius of John Marston*

GUSTAV CROSS

DURING the decade or so that followed the appearance of *The Sacred Wood* critics went ahead with the work of rehabilitating the Jacobean drama. To have rescued Tourneur, Webster, and Middleton from the contempt of such imperfect Ibsenites as Shaw and Archer on the one hand, and from the excessive and uncritical adulation of romantics like Lamb and Swinburne on the other was no inconsiderable achievement, and no one can deny Eliot's part in it. His insistence, among other things, on the importance of dramatic conventions, with his notes towards the definition of 'poetic drama', made possible the demonstration of the real excellence of plays like *The Revengers Tragedy* and *The Changeling*, and if the case of Webster remained *sub judice* at least one could now be wrong about him in the right way. Fairly rigorous effort sustained for two scholarly generations since then has not called for any substantial critical re-landscaping: the Jacobeans remain for the most part where Eliot left them, suspended, like their plays, between convention and reality. The art they practised was 'impure', yet we see clearly what they would be at, and we endorse Eliot's estimate of the individual dramatists.

With the exception, that is, of John Marston. Eliot's account of him now seems wilfully perverse, and for want of something better we tend to fall back on what the Victorians said about him. For most critics Marston is still the archetypal Elizabethan Malcontent, a cynical railer given to rant and smut. Grotesque posturing and self-dramatisation mar everything he wrote, and apart from a few felicitous phrases and images we regard him as

a notoriously bad poet. Like the Victorians, in fact, we equate Marston with the parody of him that Jonson pilloried in *Poetaster*, and as criticism this just won't do. After due allowance has been made for his ill temper and quarrelsomeness, his linguistic eccentricity and stridency, his determined *avant-gardism* and general outrageousness there is a great deal more to Marston than has yet been recognised. He has for too long been the most neglected of Shakespeare's contemporaries; if we could see him for once in focus we should have a sharper image of the period as a whole, and an adequate assessment of his work is called for before we make up our minds about the Jacobeans.

To begin with, the most important thing to remember about Marston is that he was first and foremost a moralist. It is customary to detect an ambivalence in his attitude towards some of the vices he castigates, and his sincerity has often been called in question, yet the strength of his moral purpose shines clearly through all his writings—including the much misunderstood *Pigmalion's Image*, which turns out to be, as Marston claimed, a burlesque of the fashionable erotic epyllion of the 1590s. Despite its great unevenness, his work has the consistency of purpose one would expect from a writer who set out as a scourger of villainy and ended as a divine. The over-emphasis and exaggeration—the coarseness and bitterness for which he has frequently been censured—need not be taken as evidence of a morbid fascination with his subject: Marston writes in the tradition of the hell-fire preacher who paints vice at its most vicious in the hope that his audience will look to heaven.

Although the incidental objects of Marston's attack in the obscure and darkly allusive formal satires and early comedies are the familiar ones of much sixteenth-century satirical writing, the theme to which he recurs most persistently is lust. He quarrelled with Hall for expending his satire on trivial subjects when monstrous perversions and debaucheries begged to be unmasked, and in the second satire of *The Scourge of Villainy* (an imitation of Juvenal's *Difficile est Satyram non scribere*) he paints a revolting picture of a world enthralled by sexuality. One is less tempted

to speculate on the psychopathology of the poet when one recalls the social significance of lechery in Elizabethan times. Sexuality was both a symptom and a symbol of the disruptive power of the passions, and in the context of *Hamlet* and *Lear* Marston's satires make their point adequately enough. Valuable as an indication of the temper of the 1600s, as poetry they are unimpressive. The last word, however, rests with Marston, not the critic: 'Hee that thinks worse of my rimes then my selfe, I scorne him, for he cannot, he that thinks better, is a foole.'

Whether his own inclination, or Bishop Whitgift's edict forbidding the publication of verse satire, turned Marston's attention towards the theatre, his dramatic work shows the same pre-occupation with problems of morality. The tormented, lust-driven tyrants of the tragicomedies are set against the same background of utter depravity that we find in the satires. By a stroke of genius Marston found the perfect theatrical setting for the tragedy of his age. He was the first dramatist to exploit the tremendous potential that lay to hand in the Elizabethan stock response to Renaissance Italy; in the *Antonio* plays he introduces that sinister and savagely corrupt Italian court which was to become such a powerful and convincing Jacobean symbol for viciousness and moral sickness.

*Antonio and Mellida* and its sequel, *Antonio's Revenge*, are not dramatic masterpieces. For his initial effort Marston reverted to the Kydian formula, initiating the revival of revenge tragedy, and it is easy to poke fun at his piling up of horrors—unmotivated violence, bloody banquets, ghosts, and the rest of the Senecan stock-in-trade. Yet these plays were the first to convey the sense of desolation and spiritual emptiness, cynical disillusionment, and the feeling that all human endeavour is futile in a world dominated by the powers of evil, that characterises the intellectual milieu of the early seventeenth century. The ideas prevalent at this time of the imminent disintegration and decay of the moral and physical universe, and of the inefficacy of human reason, faced with the inevitable reversion of creation to the primal chaos, receives its earliest dramatic expression in *Antonio's Revenge*:

There glowe no sparkes of reason in the world:  
 All are rak't up in ashie beastlinesse.  
 The bulke of man's as darke as Erebus,  
 No branch of Reasons light hangs in his trunke;  
 There lives no reason to keepe league withall.

(I.81.)<sup>1</sup>

The revenge motive itself, over-worked though it was, points to a passionate concern with the principles of justice in a fallen world. The tyrant's relentless persecution of his victims—for the most unsubstantial reasons—is far different from the healthy gusto with which Kyd's extroverted revengers pursue their ends. Marston's Piero is the personification of disinterested malignancy. In the *Antonio* plays and in *The Malcontent* we see the baneful influence of the tyrannical despot spread through his associates to pervert the ends of justice itself. In the court of the unjust ruler murder, lust, and all manner of lesser wickednesses flourish. Malevole the *Malcontent* sums up Marston's vision of the world. World? Tis the onely region of Death, the greatest shop of the Divell, cruelst prison of men, out of the which none passe without paying their dearest breath for a fee. There's nothing perfect in it but extreame calamitie. (I. 194.)

Faced with this utter blankness of evil Marston is concerned not only to find solutions to the moral problems posed by his plots, but with the discovery of a valid philosophy of life. The positive values to which his heroes cling are to be found in stoicism, although it is obvious from the outset that the maintenance of philosophic calm and indifference to adversity is an impossible ideal. The dignified bearing and fortitude of old Andrugio in *Antonio's Revenge* caused Piero to abjure his villainies, yet this turned out to be more Machiavellian subterfuge. An earlier generation may have found consolation in philosophy, but these wicked times call for action. Marston the satirist had already found stoicism impracticable:

Preach not the Stoic's patience to me:  
 I hate no man, but men's impiety.

(*Scourge*, Sat. II. 5-6.)

<sup>1</sup>This and subsequent quotations from the plays are from *The Plays of John Marston*, edited by H. Harvey Wood (Edinburgh, 3 vols., 1934-39), to which I refer by volume and page number. For the satires I have used Bullen's edition of the *Works* (London, 1887), vol. III.



In *Antonio's Revenge* Antonio tosses aside Seneca's *De Providentia* with the contemptuous comment:

Thou wrapt in furies, baking thy lymbs 'fore fiers,  
Forbidst the frozen Zone to shudder.

(I. 92.)

and even the stoical Pandulpho discovers that 'Men will break out, despite Philosophie' (I. 121). Pietro in *The Malcontent* scorns the suggestion that he might take comfort from Seneca:

Out upon him, he writ of Temperance and Fortitude, yet lived like a voluptuous Epicure, and died like an effeminate coward.

(I. 174.)

A lot has been written on the 'Senecan element' in Marston, yet nobody seems to have noticed that his plays are philosophic explorations of the moral philosophy of the stoics.

*The Malcontent*, the most underrated of Jacobean plays, is a subtle and complex work. Malevole the Malcontent, in reality the deposed Duke Altofront, a just and upright ruler, mingles with the depraved and dissolute creatures who haunt the court of the usurper, and by means of the 'sharp surgery' of satire purges the realm of corruption and regains his throne. (No other revenge play so successfully unites satire with tragic feeling, and no other revenger is as stern a moralist as Altofront.) Compelled by adversity to plot and dissimulate, he puts his disguise to a good purpose: using his assumed folly as a stalking horse, he seeks to bring home to the usurper and his sycophantic followers the enormity of their offences. Before we meet the Malcontent we are told that

his highest delight is to procure others vexation, and therein hee thinkes he truly serves heaven; for tis his position, whosoever in this earth can be contented is a slave and dam'd.

(I. 146.)

Ironically, by procuring the vexation of his enemies Altofront does serve heaven: his revenge is aimed not at the death of Pietro, but at putting him in the way of repentance, and, ultimately, salvation.

Altofront is Marston's most memorable dramatic figure, but even more successful than his handling of character and plot is the way in which Marston uses language to achieve a variety of

effects. Although the play is written mainly in prose it has the emotional intensity of dramatic poetry: the ironic reversals of situation are reinforced by verbal ironies, while the atmosphere of corruption and decadence is created and sustained by the imagery. The veil of hypocrisy that surrounds the action of the usurper and his faction is pierced and torn aside by the bitter invective of the Malcontent, who uses the language of satire. Eliot's claim that the virtues of *The Malcontent* lie in 'its freedom from the grosser faults to be expected of Marston' does much less than justice to a play with many positive merits.

*The Malcontent* represents Marston's affirmation of faith in the efficacy of satire as a social and moral corrective. It is also the most sombre of his plays, despite the eventual triumph of Altofront over his foes. His next most successful tragicomedy, *The Dutch Courtezan*, is in lighter vein, although Francischina the courtezan is the most villainous figure in Marston's gallery. In the prologue Marston declares that his intent was 'not to instruct, but to delight', yet clearly he is preoccupied throughout with moral and philosophical problems. Critics who have condemned the play as 'lecherous and filthy' have missed the whole point: there is a great deal of sexual innuendo in *The Dutch Courtezan* because Marston's main theme in this play is the nature of human sexuality. The setting this time is not Italy but Elizabethan London—a London of brothels and hot-houses, of bawds, pimps and prostitutes. If the action of the play approaches tragedy on occasion, there is something essentially comic in the spectacle of man enslaved by his sexual appetites, and Marston contrives to keep the comedy uppermost. It still remains to be noted, incidentally, that Marston is a master of comic situation—not only in this play and *The Fawne*, but in such inconsiderable works as *Jack Drum* and *What You Will*.

Marston found further confirmation of the inadequacy of the philosophy of the stoics in Florio's Montaigne, and the main plot of *The Dutch Courtezan* develops into a debate between stoic and anti-stoic concerning the 'naturalness' of sexuality. Freevill, the hero, is a dramatisation of Montaigne's 'natural man', a figure,

who was to feature largely in English drama of the Restoration, but whom Marston was the first to bring on the stage. He is contrasted with the aptly named Malheureux, who professes stoicism, and declares himself impervious to the assaults of the passions. Freevill is sceptical, and takes his friend to see his whore, Francischina. Malheureux feels secure in his stoic pride, and falls an easy victim to the prostitute's charms, to the cynical amusement of Freevill, who exclaims:

Of all the fooles that would all man out-thrust,  
He that 'gainst Nature would seeme wise is worst.

(II. 80.)

Malheureux discovers that the attempt to regulate one's life by stoic precepts is not only doomed to failure, but may be attended by disastrous consequences. He finds himself quite unable to govern his passions once they are aroused, whereas Freevill the libertine rises superior to them precisely because he has given them free rein. The beautiful but unscrupulous Francischina promises herself to Malheureux, provided he first kill Freevill. The ties of friendship prove too strong, however, and Malheureux stops short of murder. Before the play ends Freevill forces his friend to acknowledge his folly in supposing reason to be proof against the power of the flesh, and he puts Malheureux on the road to moral salvation by converting him to the position of enlightened scepticism. Stoicism is shown up for a sham, a philosophy for those who are wholly ignorant of the nature of reality.

The two comedies that followed *The Dutch Courtezan—Parasitaster, or The Fawne*, and *Eastward Ho*, which Marston wrote in collaboration with Chapman and Jonson, are the most light-hearted of his plays. They are both excellently plotted, and extremely amusing, but they lack the satirical bite of the earlier work, and there is a diminished interest in ideas. What satire there is in *The Fawne* is directed at sycophancy rather than at lust, and many of the minor characters are merely humours drawn in the Jonsonian manner. No severity is needed to make the fools conscious of their folly, and it is one of the few 'comickall satyres' that can be read today with genuine amusement. Like most of

Marston's plays, it contains admirable theatre: before judging it we should recall what Marston wrote in his prefatory address to the reader. 'Comedies are writ to be spoken, not read: Remember the life of these things consists in action'. (II. 144)

In 1606, a mere eight years since he first began writing for the theatre, Marston published his last complete play. Eliot has claimed that *Sophonisba* is Marston's best play—'the most nearly adequate expression of his distorted and obstructed genius'—but this conclusion is based on the assumption that the earlier plays were neither what Marston wanted to write nor what he was most fitted for. Attracted by the solemn didacticism of *Sophonisba*, Eliot seems not to have noticed that all Marston's work is didactic, but that whereas in *The Malcontent* and *The Dutch Courtezian* he achieves a highly successful fusion of morality and drama, when *Sophonisba* becomes didactic it often ceases to be dramatic.

*Sophonisba* is Marston's only real tragedy, and quite unlike anything else he wrote. Its austerity is in keeping with its classical theme, and some of the scenes are strangely moving. Sophonisba's purity and Massinissa's uprightness are set against the lustful brutality of Syphax, a treacherous monster who most resembles Piero in *Antonio's Revenge*. The action takes place against a background of political perfidy and ineptitude, the theme being the familiar renaissance one of the power of the state over the individual, which resolves into the nature of loyalty. Philosophically, however, Marston has done a complete about face: in this play it is the adequacy of stoicism rather than its limitations that he sets out to demonstrate. Marston must have already begun to contemplate taking holy orders when he wrote it, and the calm severity of its message brings to a dignified close a dramatic career that began with so much notoriety.

And so we are back where we started: in *Sophonisba* Marston reverts to the philosophical position that his early work showed to be untenable. Although he constantly broke new ground Marston always seems to be looking over his shoulder: *Pigmalion* looks back to *Hero & Leander*; the formal satires look back to Hall; the *Antonio* plays look back to Kyd; and, finally, *Sophonisba*



looks back to stoicism. This brief survey may have shown at least the depth and seriousness of Marston's concern with moral and philosophical problems; read in this way the plays take on a new dimension, and one could go on to show how deftly he translates abstract ideas into theatrical terms. Recognition of what he was trying to do is the first step towards a juster appreciation of what he actually did.

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## *Lerici*

*for Percy Lubbock*

The day's bright butterfly  
Has again fluttered by  
And will not know why  
It made dreams in the sky.

The sea-light still shines  
In red and gold wines  
While one dreams or dines,  
And on these lines.

Fireflies float on light  
In which a man might write.  
Sad Shelley one night  
Dreamed dreams as bright.

Sea sea swings and streams,  
The tall sky seems,  
One white sail gleams  
In sea and sky and dreams.

R. WEBER

# Tragedy: Religious and Humanist

LAURENCE LERNER

I WANT to discuss whether tragedy can be Christian; and I will begin by suggesting that there are two kinds of tragedy. By the end of *Macbeth*, a man of high character has disintegrated completely, and faces despair and defeat with only a mockery of his old personality; at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the heroine, her character untarnished by defeat, dies with a splendour beside which it is paltry to be Caesar. If both these are tragedies, then there must be two tragic patterns: in one, the hero dies unquelled, victorious though defeated; in the other, he goes to pieces. The tragedy, we may call them, of triumph or of disintegration. I shall discuss each of these in turn, asking if it can be Christian, if it can be humanist.

The tragedy of disintegration must, to begin with, be marked off from the moral play, whose aim is edification. If we watch the decline of a good man in order to shake our heads and take warning, then once the play is over, and we have absorbed the lesson, we can turn away. The point made, the play need no longer exist for us: it has illustrated something negative:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,  
That sometime grew within this learned man.  
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,  
Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits  
To practise more than heavenly power permits.

But this does not do justice to the play that precedes it: if it did, we should no longer bother to read *Faustus*. Because it is a tragedy and not, as the Chorus suggests, a moral lesson, it offers us something positive: something to raise us up, as well as something to

cast us down. Where, in this pattern of tragedy, are we to locate the positives?

To grow in evil can mean, after all, to grow. We could consider *The Changeling*, which Eliot and Miss Gardner have suggested is this kind of tragedy. Both of them point out that Beatrice-Joanna, who is a child, morally, when the play begins, has become a moral agent at the end: damnation has taught her responsibility. There is no doubt that Middleton intended this: he altered his source, simplifying the plot greatly, in order to show both the steadiness of her deterioration, and the fact that her first thoughtless crime was what began it. By the end of the play, though we cannot say she is a better person, she is certainly more adult: she speaks a poetry that is imbued, now, with a sense of an order of things beyond her own desires.

This theme of the awakening of responsibility is after all common in Elizabethan drama. Gloucester, in *Lear*, follows a similar course to Beatrice-Joanna: credulous and weak, he finds himself becoming a fellow-traveller and an instrument of evil, and only when he realises the enormity of what he is, in part, responsible for, does a full moral sense awake. In *Tis Pity she's a Whore*, Ford deals (but sketchily: he has none of Middleton's ruthless clarity) with the same theme. Giovanni and Arabella are children when the play begins; they grow in evil, and then in the end Arabella at least has gained a sense of what they have done: a fitful sense, because Ford's talent for sensationalism interferes with any consistency of theme, but her flashes are genuine:

Brother, dear brother, know what I have been,  
And know that now there's but a dining time  
Twixt us and our confusion.

But, of course, this is no answer to our question. We cannot really locate the positives of the tragedy of disintegration in the awakening of responsibility. For one thing, it will not fit them all: only those where the hero goes wrong because, at the beginning, his moral sense is not yet awakened. It will not fit *Macbeth*, for instance. Further, it seems to be an extra, not a central element in any play: an incidental consequence of the main issue, and it is

that we must look for first. And, most important, we ought surely to want to ask what sort of positive this is. If responsibility can be bought only at the price of damnation, what is it worth?

You may say that the price need not be paid: God is all-forgiving, and Gloucester, after all, goes on to see his fault and mend. But God's forgiveness, if we are shown no element in the degraded character for it to fasten on, is irrelevant to the play. If we see a man make himself worthy of damnation, then God's possible leniency in none the less not damning him is no comfort to us, nor anything we can know. And Gloucester's subsequent redemption assimilates him to the other tragic pattern (which can also treat the theme of responsibility, and more centrally, since it will be part of a process of general redemption in the hero). In so far as Beatrice-Joanna has a sense of her own enormity at the end, we can of course find a touch of the other pattern in *The Changeling* too, and this can lead to the suggestion that the two patterns are merely two poles on a scale. But if the tragedy is religious (not merely that of disintegration but of damnation), then there can be no such question of degree: either you are damned or you aren't.

I therefore look elsewhere for the positives in such tragedy. Briefly, if our view of it is Christian, these are located in Divine Justice; if humanist, in the compassionate spectator.

In its quiet way, there is no more moving moment in *Dr. Faustus* than this, during his conversation with the scholars:

FAUSTUS: Lucifer and Mephistophilis. Ah, gentlemen, I gave them my soul for my cunning!

ALL: God forbid!

FAUSTUS: God forbade it, indeed; but Faustus hath done it:

Briefly invoked here—largely by the scholars' momentary hush of horror—is a sense of values pressing on the action from without; what is more fully called up in the final soliloquy:

O I'll leap up to my God!—Who pulls me down?  
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!  
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ!  
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!



Yet will I call on him: O spare me, Lucifer!—  
 Where is it now? Tis gone: and see, where God  
 Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows!  
 Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,  
 And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!

This implies the whole Christian scheme. We are to feel that Faustus has struck against that, and his defeat is liberating rather than depressing. Something greater than himself, as it is greater than the mountains and hills, has been asserted.

With *Macbeth* it is harder. In this play is no such sense of a scale of values beyond the hero manifesting itself. Or not in the centre of the play:

CAITHNESS: Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies.  
 Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him  
 Do call it valiant fury; but, for certain,  
 He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause  
 Within the belt of rule.

ANGUS: Now does he feel  
 His secret murders sticking on his hands;  
 Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach;  
 Those he commands move only in command,  
 Nothing in love; now does he feel his title  
 Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe  
 Upon a dwarfish thief. . . .

CAITHNESS: Well, march we on,  
 To give obedience where 'tis truly ow'd;  
 Meet we the medicine of the sickly weal,  
 And with him pour we in our country's purge  
 Each drop of us.

Here is the community that Macbeth has wronged. This is poetry that quickens, surely, with a feeling for the commonweal. The images of the clothes that don't fit, of the cause that won't be buckled, imply an order where things do fit. The blessing which the lines imply is that of healing: the medicine of the sickly weal.

Perhaps the tragic victim in *Macbeth* is Scotland: as in Jonson's *Sejanus* it is Rome. The commonweal is a scale of values that goes beyond the individual. Yet, this parallel once offered, we can see that it won't go far. In *Sejanus* the only positive—its only claim

to be tragedy, and not edification (or, more probably, satire)—is its feeling for the greatness of Rome, whose tragic flaw is to have produced Sejanus. But in *Macbeth*, though Scotland is important, more so, perhaps, than we always realise (the play ends not with Macbeth but with the restoration of the commonweal), it is obviously not at the centre. The heart of the tragedy is not what Macbeth did to his country, but what he did to himself.

Yet nowhere in his fall does he imply, with the same directness as Faustus, a cosmic and supernatural scale of values. Macbeth's emotion, in the last act, is despair. No implication of a later regeneration attaches to the sere, the yellow leaf; no promise of redemption springs from the curses, not loud but deep. Mere hopelessness has perceived that his honour is mouth-honour. There is no sense that the universe is richer for what is being done to Macbeth. If the positive in this play is Divine Justice (or, as Helen Gardner calls it, Eternal law), then Eternal law is vindictive.

And I am not really happy about *Faustus* either. For offering such a defence as I have done of the play's greatness, comes close to approving damnation: to saying that the value of forgiveness entails not being able to extend it to everyone. This, however, takes us to the very frontier of literary criticism, if not over it. Nor is this surprising, since our topic is far more than academic: given the greatness of tragedy, whether we think it Christian must involve our attitude to Christianity. But I will shrink, as far as I can, back on to this side of the frontier.

With the humanist view we can do much better: for here we locate the positives in ourselves. We admit that in *Macbeth* we are watching the story of a total defeat: the value lies in our knowing, now, that it matters:

I have lived long enough; my way of life  
Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but in their stead  
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

It isn't that there is any gain in Macbeth being reduced to despair. It is that Shakespeare is telling us the truth: 'Look—here's despair. See how strong it is, and look, you have it in you.' And this is implicitly a guarantee that if we were to despair, others could be moved at our plight as we are at Macbeth's. The poetry is precious because the act of expression establishes a human bond: such things matter. In a world ruled by the moral law, there is not the same need for this assurance; in an existentialist world whose values have yet to be made, it can be the basis of everything. If the tragedy of disintegration is Christian, then the tragic emotion, felt by the audience, is despair underlaid with reassurance. If it is humanist, the tragic emotion is grief: our grief for the despair of the hero.

For the opposite pattern, I turn first to *Athalie*. This is the story of the feud between the wicked Queen of Juda and Joad, the high priest, who has been concealing the young heir to the throne. Both he and the choir assure us continually that God will not desert his own:

Pendant que le pauvre à ta table  
Goutera de ta paix la douceur ineffable,  
Ils boiront dans la coupe affreuse, inépuisable,  
Que tu présenteras, au jour de ta fureur,  
À toute la race coupable.

This note is sounded so strongly throughout the play, that it is clear even to the reader who doesn't know the story that Racine will not let us down. If God failed His people, the anti-climax would be intolerable; and *Athalie* is outwitted (by a trick of Joas's, which the play calls 'God') and killed, Joas becoming king.

*Athalie* is, of course, not a tragedy. It shows us a straight trial of strength between God and Baal, and God wins. If any of the characters has a tragic vision it is Abner, whose viewpoint is firmly rejected. Now if we simply transpose God's vindication of his people from this world to the next, this would not make the outcome any more tragic. The virtuous would merely have to wait a bit longer for their reward. I questioned the first tragic pattern

to ask where the positives lay. Here we need to ask, Where is the negative? The martyrdom of a saint, accompanied by an assurance of his canonisation and entry into heaven, is not tragic. This is the pattern in which the hero goes down triumphant: but clearly he must go down.

It need not follow that no Christian can write such a tragedy. What matters is how far the Christian promise of ultimate reward is operative in the play. And if there were a Christian (and there are many such today) who owed the strength of his religious convictions to an awareness of the evil of man's nature, to whom the certainty of man's chance of redemption, the putting right of the ills of this world in the next, were little more than shadowy corollaries of this conviction of sin, commanding little more than intellectual assent—in such a Christian the tragic sense would in no measure be dimmed by the certainties of faith. Christian confidence is not likely to be realised in the poetry he writes.

Milton, one feels, may have been such a Christian. Is *Samson Agonistes* tragic? By summarising the story we could easily show that it isn't, that it ends in a clear victory of God and Samson against enemies, that it is Milton's last hymn of praise to God's providence. But the play is not, we know, like that at all. In the end, we applaud Samson not because he's victorious but because of the way he's behaved:

Come, come no time for lamentation now,  
Nor much more cause, Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished  
A life heroic, on his enemies  
Fully revenged, hath left them years of mourning. . . .  
Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail,  
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,  
Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble. . . .

The positives here have nothing to do with Samson going to heaven, or with the existence of God as the protector of Israel who has not let them down. The power of the lines does not depend on faith: God might not exist, but still Samson has cut the right figure in death. His fate is not offered as evidence of



God's protection, but is like that of Racine's *Bajazet* or *Athalie*, or Sophocles' *Antigone*. Nothing is here for tears because Samson died in tragic dignity.

Of course the values asserted by the hero as he dies triumphant may not be those of Christianity. Perhaps, even, they cannot be: Samson is of the Old Testament, and triumph is not a Christian virtue. The least Christian of the Elizabethan dramatists, Chapman, is (significantly, perhaps) the fondest of this second pattern, in which the hero dies unquelled. Clermont d'Ambois, committing suicide, asserts man's independence of a moral scheme that entails self-renunciation; Bussy dies proud of his courage and defiance, an ancient Roman death, and the immortal part of him will be not his soul but his fame; and so with the death of Chabot, of Cato, of Byron. So too—and this is the supreme example—with the death of Cleopatra. The lovers die, and Caesar has won: but of course *they* have won, and Caesar is 'ass unpolicied'. Everything shows him to us as outwitted: even the clown, trivial specimen of the buoyancy with which the play ends, reassurance that Egypt, despite Caesar, will gaily go on living—and dying—as it pleases. Cleopatra's victory is her gesture, the way she dies. She is not really going to meet Mark Antony again: that is a metaphor for the assertion of their love:

I am fire and air: my other elements  
I give to baser life.

This is not personal immortality: it is the immortal significance of the moment of dying:

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing  
Of woman in me: now from head to foot  
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting Moon  
No planet is of mine.

For the humanist, there is now nothing to add. This is man going down as well as he can: to die well is your victory over death. Auden's phrase will serve us well: the tragic hero 'becomes his admirers'. If our ethical code is large enough to embrace them both, then Lear and Cleopatra are alike examples of human greatness in defeat: Lear great in the charity he has learned through

suffering, Cleopatra marble-constant in the proud gesture of her poetry.

The Christian, however, must demur. He must distinguish between Lear and Cleopatra. Lear dies asserting the Christian virtues, Cleopatra the pagan. The positives embodied in Lear command the assent of the Christian spectator: who, however, can find the outcome tragic only in so far as his acceptance of the Christian promise does not suffuse his vision of this world. Whereas those embodied in Cleopatra must be rejected, or at least placed. The play, to W. K. Wimsatt, 'pleads for certain evil choices'; it wins his admiration, but underlaid with an awareness of what he is being asked to admire—'a mature and richly human state of sin'. Cleopatra is the best that man can do without grace, and her limitations are the limitations of the natural man. The Christian reader must be aware of such a placing.

Wimsatt seems to be placing Shakespeare; but this would not be necessary if Shakespeare had already placed Cleopatra. Here is a question to which we are now conducted: readers will differ about Cleopatra, about whether she commands our total sympathy in her death, or not. Will this difference depend on the existence and strength of the reader's Christianity, or on Shakespeare's? Is it a purely literary difference: one reader claiming, another denying, that a sensitive reading of the play will reveal the subtle placings by which Shakespeare reminds us that there is a greater attitude possible? Or might two readers agree on the implications of the poetry, and differ because one applauded such splendid defiance more than the other? Do Shakespeare's intentions matter, and ought we to ask ourselves how thorough a Christian he was?

The answer to this depends on the relation between moral judgement and moral perception. If judgement is a part of perception, so that we can't perceive with any perspicacity unless we also place, then true seeing involves setting against a scale of values. The seed of literature in that case is gossip (that highly moral activity), and we expect of the poet a correct compassion,

a sympathy underlaid with valuation. But if not: if our concern with an author's opinion is purely the negative concern that it should not cloud his vision, if we ask that he see his characters clearly and regard his judgement on them not as the stimulus to seeing, not as the libido without which we are inaccessible to influence, but as a potential interference, likely to blind him with tears where he is fond (sentimentality) or with venom where he is disgusted (cynicism), then we shall display no interest in Shakespeare's Christianity, once we are satisfied that its presence or absence has not warped his picture of how Cleopatra behaves. But this is a whole new question of its own.

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## *From Helsinki to Liverpool with Lumber*

The old timber ship steams down the Mersey

—*Dimitrios N. Bogliazides*—

Though Lloyd's refuse, a vast load of trees

From anguished lands of frozen destinies,

High piled on deck, insure her own demise.

Can a ship turn over and yet not capsize?

If so, she'll do it, but if not, she tries.

A ship capsize yet not sink? It may be.

She hurts the heart's eye, by beauty wounding all,

This fabulous, overloaded, Greek ship,

Starting thoughts for leaks in the world's old plates . . .

No sweet wood there! Yet what dread load lies steep

On her ancient sides as she overweights

The estuary, lies broken against the last dock wall?

MALCOLM LOWRY

# The Ambivalence of *Bussy D'Ambois*

C. L. BARBER

ONE of the interesting things about Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* is its popularity on the Restoration stage.<sup>1</sup> Some of the reasons for this are not difficult to guess: written for the private theatre by a dramatist of neo-classical bent, it looks forward in some ways to the qualities of Restoration heroic drama—for example in its replacement of drama by debate, its use of narration, its banishment of clowning and its attempt to replace it by repartee, and even (occasionally) in its style. These qualities alone, however, are hardly enough to account for its popularity in the Restoration theatre, for they are qualities found also in Chapman's other tragedies. More important, probably, is the fact that Bussy, besides being a hero in the Marlowesque tradition, is also an embodiment of ideals that become increasingly normal in the English drama in the course of the seventeenth century: he is in fact an early dramatic example of the Man of Honour as seventeenth-century courtly circles in England came increasingly to understand the term. This helps to explain not only the popularity of *Bussy* in the later part of the century, but also some of the puzzling ambivalences of the play itself.

The idea of honour as an important determinant of upper-class conduct is not new in Chapman's time: it arises in the sixteenth century as part of the outlook of the new Tudor gentleman.<sup>2</sup> But it is an idea that changes considerably during the seventeenth century. One of the symptoms of the change is the emergence of

<sup>1</sup>See *The Tragedies of George Chapman*, ed. T. M. Parrott, London, 1910, pp. 541-2. My references throughout are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>See R. Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XIV, 1-2): Urbana, Illinois, 1929, pp. 96-9.



the phrase 'man of honour' in the sense of 'man who follows the code of honour'; before the middle of the century the phrase is rare (it does not occur in Shakespeare, for example), and when it does occur it usually means 'man of high rank, nobleman'; but in the second half of the century it is very common, and often means 'man who follows the code of honour' (though the other meaning is still frequent). More important, there is a change during the century in the characteristic situations in which honour is felt to be involved.<sup>1</sup> In Tudor times, the idea of honour (for men, not women) is especially associated with high rank (and its attendant ostentation) and with military glory: it is especially thought of, therefore, as a part of *public* life—the rewards for public service, the display necessary for a political career, and the glory won by fighting for one's sovereign. But from the turn of the century there is a gradual change of emphasis towards the *private* life: honour is associated more and more with a gentleman's sensitivity to affront, his private quarrels, the demands of friendship, the reputation he loses if a female relative is unchaste, and the correct conduct of adulterous liaisons. This change is clear in the drama, which came increasingly to cater for the courtly circles to whom honour was particularly important,<sup>2</sup> but can also be seen indirectly in the courtesy literature, especially in the constant attacks by moralists on the 'false notions of honour' prevalent in their day. Duelling, adultery, and friendship are the three key ideas of the code of honour in this later seventeenth-century form. The spread of the duel, indeed, coincides closely in the time with the rise of 'private' honour: duelling, which is distinct both from judicial combat and from the traditional blood-feud, is not much heard of before the middle of the sixteenth century, and does not become a serious social problem in England until the reign of James I.<sup>3</sup> The ideal of

<sup>1</sup>See C. L. Barber, *The Idea of Honour in the English Drama 1591-1700*: Gothenburg, 1957, pp. 263-91.

<sup>2</sup>No doubt there were puritan gentlemen (like Col. Hutchinson) whose idea of honour was different from that current in courtly circles, but their viewpoint is not represented in the theatre.

<sup>3</sup>See Kelso, *op. cit.*, p. 101: F. T. Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642*: Princeton, 1940, pp. 30-34.

private honour is seen in fully developed form in the Restoration theatre, especially in comedy, where the heroes often refer to virtue with contempt, but govern their lives by honour; honour demands above all that they shall be faithful to their friends (especially by seconding them in duels), shall be highly sensitive to affront or injury, shall accept challenges from gentlemen, shall challenge and fight gentlemen who insult or wrong them, shall not tolerate the seduction of their wives or female relatives, and shall protect the reputation of the women with whom they commit adultery.

It will be seen that Bussy D'Ambois is very close to this later ideal of the man of honour, and not much like either the Tudor gentleman serving his sovereign through Arts and Arms, or the villain-hero of revenge-tragedy (who is in the tradition of the blood-feud rather than of the code of honour).<sup>1</sup> Admittedly Bussy is *said* to have 'public' qualities: he has served as a soldier, and when he rises at court he attacks corruption; but these qualities are largely nominal, for his attack on corruption is merely generalised and verbal, and his military career is simply something that is asserted about him. What we actually *see* Bussy doing is, first, fighting a duel, and secondly committing adultery; friendship is a less important theme, but also occurs.

The play opens with Bussy as the malcontent, contemplating a disordered society which is not governed by the Stoic ideal of Reason:

Fortune, not Reason, rules the state of things,  
Reward goes backwards, Honour on his head.

(I, I, I-2.)

Here 'Honour' is the royal reward for service, which is, Bussy asserts, given to the wrong people; it suggests that the play is going to move in the world of public service, and this suggestion is reinforced by Monsieur's speech when he is tempting Bussy:

<sup>1</sup>It is significant that this early example of the man of honour in the English drama is a Frenchman, for it was in France above all that the ideal first developed, and duelling about points of honour reached its height there at about the time Bussy was written; see, for example, Bernard de Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour*: London, 1732, pp. 63-4.

If Themistocles

Had liv'd obscur'd thus in th'Athenian state,

Xerxes had made both him and it his slaves.

If brave Camillus had lurk'd so in Rome,

He had not five times been Dictator there,

Nor four times triumph'd. If Epaminondas. . .

(I, I, 65-70.)

In fact, however, Bussy makes no attempt, when he has risen at court, to become a Themistocles or a Camillus. What he does instead is to quarrel with anybody who puts any kind of slight upon him, or suggests that he is in any way an underling—a sensitivity to affront which is essential to the man of honour, who must never be put upon and must insist on every jot and tittle of his rights. First Bussy breaks the head of Maffé, the Monsieur's steward, because he thinks Maffé has undervalued him. Then he reacts fierily to the Guise's attempt to browbeat him and to treat him as an inferior, and dares the Guise to repeat his words out of the king's presence (in effect a challenge). Finally, he takes offence at the sneers and insinuations of Barrisor, L'Anou, and Pyrrhot; he is supported by his friends Brisac and Melynell, and after the typical exchanges between affronted gentlemen ('I will not endure it.'—'Not you, sir?'—'No sir, nor I.') a duel is fought in which five men are killed to uphold Bussy's reputation for sensitivity to insult. In fact every incident, when Bussy comes to court, is designed to show his hypersensitivity, his immediate willingness to fight rather than tolerate the slightest slur.

The long account of the duel given by the Messenger has the effect of glorifying it, of giving it an epic quality. Great emphasis is given to the pride and spirit of Bussy (for example in refusing to accept his opponents' offered contrition), and to the claims of friendship (as when Barrisor's friends refuse to let him fight alone). Honour, too, is explicitly mentioned as a motive for fighting ('still hunt honour at the view'). There follows the Monsieur's intercession with the King for Bussy, in which he justifies duelling by 'law of reputation' and the need for saving 'fame's dear life'—a familiar argument of the man of honour, to be found throughout the seventeenth century (and later). The

King, despite his reference to 'wilful murthers', has no answer to this long apologia, and the only other critic of Bussy's behaviour is the Guise, who has a personal grudge against him.

After duelling, adultery. Bussy, unlike Tamyra, has no moral qualms about this, and argues against her conscience:

Sweet mistress, cease, your conscience is too nice,  
And bites too hotly of the Puritan spice.

(III, I, 1-2.)

The only thing that he is concerned about is the preservation of her reputation:

Sooner shall torture be the sire to pleasure,  
And health be grievous to one long time sick,  
Than the dear jewel of your fame in me  
Be made an outcast to your infamy.

(III, I, 36-9.)

Montsurry, too, is ruled by the code of honour, and so has to take revenge on his wife and Bussy for their adultery ('The course I must run for mine honour sake'—V, I, 25). There is however a clear contrast between Bussy and Montsurry. Bussy will stop at nothing to maintain his honour. When the Monsieur makes innuendoes about Tamyra, Bussy tells him bluntly that if his honour were impugned, even by the king himself, he would take his revenge 'like Death Mounted on earthquakes' (IV, I, 93-4); and the Monsieur's actions show that he believes this. On the other hand, when Tamyra complains to her husband about the Monsieur's solicitations, Montsurry refuses to take action against him, because he is a prince (II, 2, 68-77). Montsurry is therefore a less perfect man of honour than Bussy, because he tamely tolerates the courting of his wife by another man. His honour is also defective in that he takes revenge on Bussy through 'base villains' (V, 4, 56), instead of personally; this not only means that (as Bussy says) the 'wreak' is not really his, but also that his wife's dishonour is broadcast; whereas Bussy is still defending Tamyra's 'spotless name', even though their adultery is known to Montsurry: the maintaining of appearances is the important thing.

Many of the attitudes of Bussy, then, closely resemble those of



the man of honour as portrayed in the later drama. Bussy, admittedly, is never called a man of honour: the phrase hardly existed yet in its later sense; but his resemblance to the heroes of Restoration drama is striking. This fact perhaps casts a little light on one of the perplexing things about the play: its ambiguity, the difficulty of knowing how to take it.

On the one hand, it is possible to read *Bussy* as a play in which blood (passion) triumphs over reason: 'blood' is a key-word of the play, and is used both of Tamyra's lust and of Bussy's fiery spirit—Bussy indeed is called 'the man of blood' (III,2,373). The triumph of the blood leads to the shedding of blood—a theme that is made abundantly clear. On the other hand, it is impossible not to feel that we are meant to sympathise with Bussy's high spirit, sensitivity to affront, and Marlovian aspiration: this feeling is built up, for example, by the magniloquence of the Messenger's account of the duel, by the admiration of other characters ('His great heart will not down...'), and by the identification of Bussy with Hercules<sup>1</sup> (especially at the end of the play, with its references to Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*). These two conflicting attitudes to Bussy are never reconciled or adjudicated between, and there is no character that we can accept as an authentic commentator on the action: Monsieur and the Guise are often critical of Bussy, but they are interested parties, and it is never certain that their comments are choric. The audience is left, therefore, with unresolved contradictions of feeling.

Now, the two sets of attitudes correspond quite closely to (a) traditional Christian morality, and (b) the code of honour as it developed in seventeenth-century England. Even in Tudor times there had been some discrepancy between the demands of religion and those of honour; but this discrepancy increased greatly in the following century, with the spread of duelling and the shift in emphasis in the code of honour from public life to private life. In the Restoration drama, the discrepancy was overcome simply by disregarding traditional Christian morals (which were the

<sup>1</sup>See A. S. Ferguson, 'The Plays of George Chapman', *MLR* XIII, pp. 15–20; R. W. Battenhouse, 'Chapman and the Nature of Man', *ELH* XII, 2, pp. 97–8.

hypocrisy of canting tradesmen) and by accepting the code of honour as the norm for gentlemanly behaviour (a solution foreshadowed by Beaumont and Fletcher and their successors). Chapman was too firmly rooted in Tudor ways of thinking to reach this solution, but he was plainly sensitive to the direction being taken by the courtiers of James's reign, with their condemnation of the 'puritan spice' and their duelling, and with part of his mind he sympathised with them. The outcome in *Bussy D'Ambois* is a play which can be read in two different ways: either as if written for an audience which accepted traditional Christian morality, or as if written for an audience which accepted the code of honour; and Chapman does not force us to choose between the two readings. In a way, the play is an early victim of the moral and political tensions that were to lead in the next age to the sharp dichotomy between Tradesman and Courtier, Cit and Man of Honour.

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#### A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, Vol. III, No. 1

The first number to be published in 1962 will have Fiction as its theme. The articles will include: 'Hardy in the Tropics', by Roy Morrell; 'Tess and the Romantic Milkmaid', by George Wing; 'The Novels of George Meredith', by Phyllis Bartlett; 'Samuel Butler in Italy' (illustrated with four half-tone plates), by Angelo Giovanni; 'Form versus Substance in Henry James', by Miriam Allott; and 'The Unmasking of *Clarissa Dalloway*', by A. D. Moody

# Joyce and Jonson

J. B. BAMBOROUGH

JOYCE once told Frank Budgen that Ben Jonson was one of the only four authors whose works he had read all the way through.<sup>1</sup> He read him in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris in 1903, and he read him 'systematically', according to Stanislaus Joyce, who adds that it was:

a curious choice, when one bears in mind that my brother read only when moved by interest in a writer or a subject, and never for purely cultural reasons.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly he must have felt that there was something in Jonson that he could use, and he even imitated him in passages of dialogue which were nonsense, but which Joyce felt had caught 'the true Jonsonian ring'.<sup>3</sup> In view of this interest it is perhaps odd there are so few specific references to Jonson in Joyce's work: there are a few scattered allusions in *Finnegan's Wake*<sup>4</sup> but none at all in *Ulysses*, where they might be expected to occur in at least two places—Stephen's exegesis of the Hamlet problem, and the passage of imitation Elizabethan prose in the *Oxen of the Sun* episode, which mentions, for example, Beaumont and Fletcher. But it seems to be frequently the case with Joyce that the writers he overtly refers to are not necessarily those who affected him most deeply; he does not often refer, for instance, to Newman, yet he thought Newman was the greatest prose writer of the nineteenth century, and knew whole passages of his work by heart.

The effect on Joyce of his reading of Jonson does not seem to

<sup>1</sup>F. Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, 1934, p. 186. The other three were Defoe, Flaubert and Ibsen.

<sup>2</sup>S. Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 1958, pp. 198–9; cf. R. Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 1959, pp. 124–5.

<sup>3</sup>S. Joyce, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup>See S. Atherton, *The Books at the Wake*, 1959, p. 259.

have been much considered by critics, and those who have glanced at it have usually confined their attention to Joyce's poetry. Mr. Ellmann, for example, cites the poem 'When the shy star goes forth in heaven' (No. IV of *Chamber Music*) as based on lyrics by Ben Jonson.<sup>1</sup> Yet this poem, though it may owe something to Jonson in its phrasing and rhythm, seems to owe as much to Verlaine, perhaps via Dowson or Symons. A better example may be the poem 'Ecce Puer', which has the concision and restraint of Jonson's epigrams to his son and his daughter, and his 'Epitaph for Salamon Pavy.' Joyce's poetry, however, for all that some of it was printed in the Imagist anthology, is very much of the 1890's in its vocabulary, tone and rhythms, though this is less true of *Poems Penyeach* than it is of *Chamber Music*. It may well be that Jonson's example helped him to discipline a natural lyric diffuseness and achieve a greater precision and clarity of style, though it would be difficult to distinguish Jonson's influence from that of the other Elizabethan lyricists and madrigalists, of whom Joyce was very fond. But the effect of his poetry is altogether different from Jonson's. It is essentially lyrical, written by a singer and meant to be sung; Jonson wrote comparatively few lyrics, though some very fine ones. Joyce's poems, with some few exceptions, are soft, vague and musical, and very much 'mood poetry'; Jonson's are clear, stated, and unemotional. Joyce is Celtic, Jonson Roman, and the shadow of Symbolism has fallen between them. Only in one kind of poetry do they really resemble one another, and that is in their vituperative verse. Joyce savaging his enemies and rivals in *Gas from a Burner* or *The Holy Office* is very like Jonson in his 'Ode to Himself', or the 'Expostulation with Inigo Jones'. This is the old tradition of the 'flyting', which disappeared in England under the pressure of the 'polite' and gentlemanly. Neither Joyce nor Jonson had much time for gentlemanliness; instead they had the arrogance of the artist, and they expressed it in similar terms:

Come leave the loathed stage  
And the more lothsome age:

<sup>1</sup>Ellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 125.



Where pride and impudence (in faction knit)  
 Usurpe the chaire of Wit!  
 Indicating, and arraigning every day  
 Something they call a Play.  
 Let their fastidious, vaine  
 Commission of the braine  
 Run on, and rage, sweat, censure, and condemn:  
 They were not made for thee: less, thou for them. . . .

So distantly I turn to view  
 The shamblings of that motley crew,  
 Those souls that hate the strength that mine has  
 Steeled in the school of old Aquinas.  
 Where they have crouched and crawled and prayed  
 I stand, the self-doomed, unafraid,  
 Unfellowed, friendless and alone,  
 Indifferent as the herringbone. . . .  
 Though they may labour to the grave  
 My spirit they shall never have  
 Nor make my soul with theirs as one  
 Till the Mahmanvantara be done:  
 And though they spurn me from their door  
 My soul shall spurn them evermore.<sup>1</sup>

In actual fact it may well have been Jonson's prose as much as his poetry that attracted Joyce, and perhaps most of all his gift for catching the rhythm and accent of everyday life. Both men were clearly fascinated by colloquial speech, and especially by the jargon of trades and professions (compare Volpone's patter as a mountebank or Subtle's alchemical cant with the use Joyce makes, for example, of the technical terms of cricket in pages 583-4 of *Finnegan's Wake*). Indeed both were fascinated simply by words in themselves—Mr. Edmund Wilson has compared them as 'logomaniacs'<sup>2</sup>—though Jonson was never as creative in his use of language as Joyce was. Jonson was inevitably restricted by his rigid concept of Decorum ('Pure and neat Language I love, yet plaine and customary')<sup>3</sup> and one can barely imagine what he

<sup>1</sup>B. Jonson, *Ode to Himself*, ll, 1-10 (*Works*, ed. Herford and Simpson, VI, p. 492); Joyce, *The Holy Office*, ll, 79-86, 91-96.

<sup>2</sup>E. Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers*, 1952, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup>*Discoveries*, ll, 1870-1.

would have made of the verbal experiments of *Finnegan's Wake*. But Joyce could have learnt from him how to construct a character through language—and some of Jonson's characters are little more than bundles of verbal characteristics—and how to make words, in an argument or a harangue, take the place of action. The *Cyclops* episode in *Ulysses*, in which Bloom argues with the Citizen, might be a development of the quarrel between Face and Subtle at the beginning of *The Alchemist*, or the dispute between the bogus lawyers in *Epicoene*. A liking for verbal violence and extravagance is common to both men, and in both the aural imagination is of as great, if not greater, importance than the visual.

Joyce could have learnt from Jonson, too, the art of organising complex stories with a multiplicity of characters. *Bartholomew Fair*, which has a cast of over forty speaking parts, is an acknowledged masterpiece of intricate construction, and in its way is a kind of sketch for *Ulysses*. Both follow the actions of selected characters over a limited period of time, but through a maze of episodes; *Ulysses*, of course, is far more complex, and Joyce has the space for far greater detail, but the careful interweaving of incident and the interaction of different characters are not dissimilar. Such construction is now, after Joyce, commonplace in the novel, but *Bartholomew Fair* was virtually the only precedent in English for Joyce to follow. Less obvious, but equally important, is the tendency shared by both men to prefer some kind of hidden structure in their work. Almost from the first Joyce built his writing up on some 'skeleton' not always immediately obvious to the reader. Some of the stories in *Dubliners*, for example, are built on liturgical patterns; the *Portrait of the Artist* much more overtly parallels the gradual awakening of the consciousness of the child, and the process becomes fully visible in *Ulysses*, with its correspondences to the *Odyssey*—though much that is hidden in the book is hardly obvious to anyone reading without the aid of the commentators. Jonson similarly offers some hidden, usually allegorical meaning, most fully in *Cynthia's Revels* and in his *Masques*: elsewhere he may make a partial use

of Allegory, as he does in the *Devil is an Ass*, or he may organise his play round a dominant theme, as *Epicoene* is organised round the concepts of 'unnaturalness' and 'frigidity'.<sup>1</sup> Joyce carries the use of Allegory to an extreme in *Finnegan's Wake*, which is capable of a fourfold exegesis in the medieval manner. The artistic drive in every case is towards providing a source of inner strength and a significance to be grasped only by the fully attentive reader, and we may deduce from it both a tendency to pedantic over-elaboration (and both men had the minds of scholars) and a reluctance to commit their inspiration naked to the blasts of criticism.

Neither Joyce nor Jonson was an improviser; both needed a plan to follow and were reluctant to trust to chance inspiration, if indeed chance inspiration was something that played a part in their work at all. In Jungian terms, both are 'introvert' artists. Both were learned writers, and expected their readers to be learned too, and to read them with the careful attention of the scholar; in return both promised (and in fact give) satisfaction ungained by the cursory reader. Both, too, needed help from other writing to give them impetus and to strengthen their execution; Joyce could have welcomed Jonson's insistence in his *Discoveries* on 'Imitation' as necessary for the formation of the artist. At the time Joyce was elaborating his own aesthetic he could have gained much help from *Discoveries*,<sup>2</sup> in which Jonson appears as an independent theoriser, taking the best from other men's work but reforming their ideas to suit his own needs—very much Joyce's case. But above all Joyce must have responded to Jonson's self-sufficiency and high regard for the position of the artist. When he first read Jonson he had left Dublin resolved, in Jonson's words, to sing something 'high and aloof, Safe from the wolves black jaw, and the dull asses hoof',<sup>3</sup> and he was to become the archetype of the intellectual in exile.

<sup>1</sup>L. E. Partridge: *The Allusiveness of Epicoene*, E.L.H., XXII (1955), pp. 93-107.

<sup>2</sup>One critical term he seems to have picked up from Jonson is 'epitasis' which he uses in a book review of November, 1903 (*Critical writing of James Joyce*, ed. E. Mason and R. Ellmann, 1959, p. 139), and again in *Ulysses*, p. 200, along with its companion-terms 'protasis', 'catastasis' and 'catastrophe'.

<sup>3</sup>Epilogue to *Poetaster* ll. 238-9.

Jonson, too, often seems an alien in the world of Elizabethan drama, so little does his own work share the common characteristics of his contemporaries; indeed many readers today find him hostile to their sympathies and somehow 'un-English'. Joyce, brought up in the tail-end of the Aesthetic movement, could not have accepted Jonson's pre-occupation with moral preaching (it was partly because of his freedom from moral judgements that he so much admired Ibsen), but Jonson's stern and lofty conception of the duty and the isolation of the artist was very like his own. Alone in Paris and barely twenty-one, Joyce needed to find writers like himself, dedicated both to their Art and to an unsparing fidelity to the real, and in Jonson he found, if only perhaps for a time, such a master.

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#### A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, Vol. III, No. 2

A Poetry number, to be published in April 1962, will include: 'Chaucer, Pope and Fame', by A. C. Cawley; 'The Pastoral Realism of *Lycidas*', by Robert Beum; 'The Problems of Prosody', by Terence Hawkes; 'The Photographic Art', by Patricia Ball; 'The Religious Development of Dylan Thomas', by Howard Sergeant; 'Emily Dickinson and the Poetry of the Inner Life', by Elizabeth Jennings; and 'The Beginnings of a Nigerian Literature in English', by Martin Banham.



# The Trial Scene in 'The Merchant of Venice'

E. M. W. TILLYARD

MRS. Jameson<sup>1</sup> declared that in the trial scene Portia had two objects in view; to deliver her husband's friend and to maintain her husband's honour by the discharge of his just debt. 'It is evident that she would owe the safety of Antonio to anything rather than to the legal quibble with which her cousin Bellario has armed her, and which she reserves as a last resource.' I wonder. Was the legal quibble a last, and presumably uncertain, resource? Or is Mrs. Jameson, through the very definiteness of her error, suggesting an equally definite contrary embodying a truth not yet fully apprehended? May not the legal quibble be, not a last resource, but a trump-card Portia keeps serenely up her sleeve while transacting business quite other than that which Mrs. Jameson assigns to her? The moment Portia produces her quibble, Shylock's case collapses. His enemies know instantaneously that it *has* collapsed, and he attempts not a single quibble in retort. In its context the quibble is an infallible magic spell, in keeping with the fairy-tale substance of the two main plots.

What was it then that Shakespeare most had to do, granted that his Portia was untroubled in mind on Antonio's account, knowing that she possessed a spell insuring his release? As a practising dramatist he wanted in the first place to present an effective scene, something of the greatest possible dramatic interest; and indeed it is an enrichment of the dramatic situation if Portia knows she has Shylock quite within her power while the other characters know no such thing: if she is cool about the thing all the others agonize over; if she is able to prolong her moment of power before enjoying the supreme satisfaction of

<sup>1</sup>*Shakespeare's Heroines* (Temple Classics), London, 1904, p. 8.

giving to the sorely tried sufferers their unexpected and spectacular relief. I would not deny the presence of such elements; only they coexist with something more important.

In his *Basis of Shakespearean Comedy*<sup>1</sup> Nevill Coghill made some important points: that the age of the *Faerie Queene* must have been generally expectant of allegory; that some of Shakespeare's comedies demand figurative as well as naturalistic understanding; and that the *Merchant of Venice* is among them. He holds that the play repeats the much exploited medieval theme of the conflict of Justice and Mercy, associating it especially with that highly stylised form of it, the story of the Four Daughters of God. These, Pity, Truth, Justice, Peace, were the virtues of man as first created. At the Fall he lost them, and in their personified form they became the Four Daughters of God. Truth and Justice were man's accusers, Pity (or Mercy) and Peace his advocates. Through Christ's agency the four were reconciled: 'Mercy and Truth are met together; Justice and Peace have kissed each other.' The theme, having entered the Morality Play, was part of the medieval inheritance of the Elizabethan age. Coghill considers the conflict between Shylock and Antonio an *exemplum* of the traditional theme. While not accepting some of the details of Coghill's account, I think he gives a necessary general truth about the play. But I also think he does not see the full part Portia has in the conflict between Justice and Mercy.

*The Merchant of Venice* belongs to the years when Spenser's vogue was at its height, when any educated audience would be quite familiar with Spenser's habit of sliding characters along a scale that was naturalistic at one end and allegorical at the other, his most elaborate example being that of the jealous Malbecco, who, from a highly realistic old man, turns into a perfected allegory of Jealousy. Having seen Portia begin as a witty Elizabethan lady, change into the fairy-princess of the Beautiful Mountain, and change again into the tom-boy of contemporary romantic comedy, the original audience would have been well prepared for further changes. Moreover she enters doubly

<sup>1</sup>*Essays and Studies of the English Association*, 1950, pp. 1-28.

disguised, as a man and as a doctor of laws of Rome; hence the reader to have exchanged an old for a new self. She arrives in state, heralded by a forerunner; and her tone, when she has entered, is magisterial. She dictates what is right or wrong and speaks with more authority than the Duke himself, while Bassanio assumes that she can 'wrest' the law of Venice itself to her will. In this magisterial assurance she has ceased to be a young woman and has turned into an allegory—of what? Not of Mercy alone, though that is her main theme and though the audience, knowing her to be a woman and mindful of Spenser's *Mercilla*, would at once be prone to take her as such. But she is Mercy clothed in the robes of Justice and can only stand for Justice and Mercy reconciled, in accordance with her own words about earthly power being most godlike 'when mercy seasons justice'. Mercy must season justice but may not 'wrest' it, and Bassanio's plea can only be rejected.

We have arrived at this point, then, that Portia stands, after the manner of the Four Daughters story, for Mercy reconciled with Justice and that she knows she possesses the infallible means of rescuing Antonio according to the strict letter of the law, Antonio not needing in actual fact any exercise of mercy at all. But Christian mercy is not confined to the plight of a single unfortunate Venetian; it is concerned with the souls of all men, specifically here with those of Jews as well as of Venetians. When Portia lectures Shylock on mercy, while the other persons on the stage can only think of Antonio's fate, she is thinking of Shylock's, she is imploring Shylock to recognise his own peril and to mind the salvation of his own soul. Read in this double sense, the scene gains greatly in richness of content.

Let me now examine the scene (IV, 1) in the light of what I have written. It begins with the utter lack of mercy in Shylock, who is 'void and empty from any dram of mercy', and with Antonio's recognition of this and consequent resignation of spirit. Even so the Duke, who has thus characterised Shylock, does not give up all hope but tells him on his entry that he still expects a change of mood in him at the eleventh hour. So far all our

thoughts are directed towards Antonio, or towards Shylock only so far as his mood affects Antonio. And when Shylock enlarges on his abhorrence of his debtor and on his own inflexibility he confirms that direction. Then, for the first time, with the Duke's words, 'How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?' we are reminded of Shylock's soul. Shylock, insensitive to this Christian plea, asserts that he has nothing to fear, for he has the law on his side; and he begins to stand for legality as well as retaining his human character. The Duke can now do no more for Antonio, and the last slender chance is the opinion of the lawyer Bellario, whom the Duke has consulted by letter and whose messenger is at hand. Again, with Bassanio's 'Good cheer, Antonio; what, man, courage yet!', it is Antonio's fate alone we think of. And yet, a few lines after, Gratiano glances at the other theme with his 'Not on thy sole but on thy soul, harsh Jew, Thou makst thy knife keen.' But he only glances, for when he proceeds to abuse Shylock for his brutality he has removed the word *soul* from its Christian context and made it mean no more than *disposition*:

thy currish spirit  
 Governed a wolf, who hanged for human slaughter,  
 Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet  
 And, whilst thou layst in thy unhallowed dam,  
 Infused itself in thee.

Thus, when Portia enters, our attention is mainly fixed on Antonio's predicament. For all that, if we have listened properly, we should have some awareness of the peril in which Shylock's soul stands, faint perhaps but ready to be roused by further reference.

The Portia who enters is, as I have said, magisterial, quite altered from the young girl whose little body was aweary of this great world. She also goes headlong into action unlike both the lovesick girl who wished to detain Bassanio 'some month or two' before he shall undergo that other judgement of the caskets and from the procrastinating Venetians among whom she finds herself. She is like a cold draught of air suddenly penetrating a



hot room and refreshing the wits of those within. Both by her difference and by her fresh energy she leads us to expect a novel way of feeling. It takes her only a moment to find that Antonio acknowledges his obligation to his bond: upon which she tells Shylock he must be merciful; Shylock queries her *must*; and she begins her oration on mercy. How does this speech satisfy the audience's expectation of the novel way of feeling I have just postulated? First, it defines the change in Portia's nature. If she is now magisterial and more certain of herself than the other characters on the stage, it is because she is now the embodiment of that mercy on which she expatiates. Second, her speech attaches itself to formal rhetoric in a way none of the previous speeches in the scene have done. As Margaret Schlauch has recently written:

Portia's great plea for mercy is in a sense the culmination of many exercises on this theme, extending from ancient times down to the sixteenth century. . . . The opportunity to elaborate *colores* upon the noble theme of mercy may well have been one of the most important rhetorical factors causing Shakespeare to make use of the improbable plot about Shylock's bond.<sup>1</sup>

And we accept this new rhetoric just because we have been startled by the nature of Portia's entry. But, thirdly, we should also perceive that the speech must be interpreted with a richness of reference not belonging to anything that has gone before but not unexpected in view of the jolt to which we have been submitted.

Take the actual text of the speech, and it is plain that Portia's plea for mercy concerns both Shylock's soul and Antonio's life: mercy is twice blest, benefiting both giver and receiver. And Portia tells Shylock, Christianwise, that justice alone is insufficient for the soul's salvation. But the mere text becomes greatly complicated through the different ways the characters take it. The Duke, having already referred to Shylock's soul, must surely give at least a passing thought to it when Portia dwells so insistently on the benefit mercy brings the giver. But the other Venetians, bent so intently on poor Antonio's plight, value her words solely as

<sup>1</sup>See article on the Court Scene in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* (Warsaw) 1960, p. 56.

they are likely to persuade Shylock to soften and so to spare his victim. Portia, knowing Antonio to be safe, aims all her eloquence at Shylock and Shylock alone. Shylock, obsessed with his hate, is deaf to the tones of her entreaty and has not the remotest idea that she pleads essentially for him and his welfare, that she is fulfilling the command of Christ to love your enemy. The audience knew the outlines of the story, knew that Antonio would not in fact lose his pound of flesh, but they would not be prevented (any more than in witnessing *Oedipus King* or *Othello*) from being caught up in the excitement of the plot, from experiencing the supposed tension of the persons in the story while the issue is undecided. But they should recognise the other issue and watch Portia in her struggle to break down Shylock's obtuseness, ready to take her words both in the way she means them and in the way the Venetians (the Duke perhaps excepted) do in fact take them. The audience are thus in a wonderfully happy position: ironically superior to most persons in the play by possessing additional knowledge and thrilled by the excitement of having two parallel meanings to apprehend. For illustration, take the way Portia begins the action:

POR. Do you confess the bond?

ANT. I do.

POR. Then must the Jew be merciful.

SHY. On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.

POR. The quality of mercy is not strained . . .

Here in her second speech the Venetians take Portia to mean that Antonio's only (and therefore crucial) chance of life is Shylock's relenting. Portia means that since Shylock cannot escape the risk of a mortal sin through some lucky flaw in the operation of the bond which will save him from the temptation of claiming his pound of flesh, it is imperative for his soul's sake that he should even yet be merciful. When Shylock queries Portia's *must*, the Venetians accept his query and hope that Portia's eloquence will sway him to spare Antonio. Portia, having first said *must* and then said that there are no *musts* about mercy, tries to stir Shylock's set and stupid wits. Can't he see that she is using *must* in two different

senses? It is of the utmost consequence to you, she means, that you should be merciful; but when it comes to mercy no one can force you, the impulse must come from your own heart, or from the yielding of your heart to the operation of heavenly grace.

And thus the scene proceeds. Seen from the point of view of Portia's Christian pleading, Shylock's retort to her eloquence, 'My deeds upon my head', is indeed dreadful in its self-damnation. Then, unable to convince Shylock of the beauty of mercy in its own right, Portia climbs down from the height from which she has begun and appeals to his advantage with, 'Shylock, there's thrice thy money offered thee'; only to find Shylock taking his stand on ground more elevated and yet for his soul's health more perilous than a simple love of gain:

An oath, an oath, I have an oath in Heaven.

Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?

Solicitous for his own soul on purely legal premises, he cannot begin to see that Portia is also solicitous, but on premises how different! Then Portia repeats both pleas simultaneously, after dwelling on the most dreadful item in the bond: that the flesh to be cut shall be nearest to the heart. Shylock refuses with an emphasis grimmer than before, bringing in his soul yet again:

by my soul I swear

There is no power in the tongue of man

To alter me.

Antonio perceives the emphasis and that Portia has failed; he asks for an end of the trial. But, even as the end appears to approach, Portia, giving Shylock every chance (or, as the Venetians think, not abandoning the minutest portion of hope on behalf of Antonio), implores Shylock to get a surgeon to stop his victim's bleeding to death, on the Christian plea of charity. Then, having made this plea in vain, Portia abandons her struggle for Shylock's soul. She is now free to abandon also her high allegorical role; which she begins to do when, in comment on Bassanio's protest that his friend's life is more to him than his own life, wife and all the world, she exclaims:

Your wife would give you little thanks for that,

If she were by, to hear you make the offer.

Begins, because she has not yet finished with the judicial part of her allegorical task. However, having begun, she must not delay her return to common humanity, since the play must not dwell too long on solemn things lest it lose its predominantly comic complexion. So she hastens to produce her trump-card, her infallible legal quibble; and the tension, so long sustained, relaxes. Portia now has no concern but with justice against Shylock; mercy now being the concern of the Duke and Antonio. The Duke is generous, granting Shylock his life in anticipation of his plea for it, and being willing to commute confiscation of half his property to a fine. But pardon comes easier to the Duke than to Shylock's victim; and Portia is careful to distinguish between them, finally asking what mercy Antonio can render Shylock. Antonio is on the whole generous in the matter of money but he makes the stipulation that Shylock shall turn Christian, a stipulation made definitive by the Duke, who says he will rescind his pardon unless Shylock complies.

In interpreting Antonio's stipulation one encounters the kind of dilemma presented by Hamlet's motive in sparing Claudius at his prayers and the irreconcilable dispute between the tough and tender critics over it. Everything is so simple if you can follow the tough ones. These (and on this issue Coghill is among them) point out that the Elizabethans found nothing odd in forcible conversions. Baptism was necessary for salvation, and it 'worked' as surely when forced as when chosen. Thus Antonio performed an act of pure Christian mercy, when, forgoing revenge, he stipulated that Shylock should turn Christian; he was returning good for evil. I should like to get out of the dilemma so easily; but in view of the many cross-references in the play and of the irony I have described as running through the trial scene I cannot help doubting so simple an explanation. For cases of cross-references, it is not fortuitous that Antonio begins the play's first scene with 'In sooth I know not why I am so sad: It wearies me'; and that Portia begins the second scene with 'By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world'. Nor again can it be fortuitous that over the triviality of the ring Bassanio and



Antonio swear on their souls as Shylock had sworn on his soul over the vital matter of his bond. Thus, when Antonio and the Duke in their mercy force Shylock to turn Christian, surely we are meant to recall Portia's pronouncement that you cannot force mercy. Even so, the tough critics could argue that Portia's forcing refers to the giver not to the receiver of mercy and that Antonio in choosing freely to force mercy on Shylock, was acting according to her principles. And yet in my heart I cannot help thinking that Portia included the receiver in her ken, and that Shakespeare meant some ironical contrast between Portia's ideals and the cruder understanding of the Venetians.

Certainly, if he does, and if I am right in detecting a long series of double meanings in Portia's speeches, the trial scene comes out richer and more complex than has usually been supposed.

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#### A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, Vol. III, No. 3

This issue, which will appear at the end of July 1962, will contain important contributions on Jonathan Swift. It will include 'Swift's *Satirical Elegy on a Late Famous General*', by Charles Peake; 'Alecto's Whip', by Herbert Davis 'Swift and the Gaelic Tradition', by Vivian Mercier, and an expert consideration of Swift's mental and physical peculiarities.

# *I know Not 'Seems': A Study of Hamlet*

J. SWART

IN his book on *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*,<sup>1</sup> Theodore Spencer presents a picture of the development of Shakespeare's art against the background of his age in which *Hamlet* finds a natural and satisfactory place. Pointing to the great metaphysical questions of the age, Spencer sees as one of the dominating features of the play, and one with far-reaching implications, the contrast between man as he should be, and man as he is. In several ways, I think, this study could provide an answer to the many critics who have, of recent years, in one way or another, expressed dissatisfaction with *Hamlet*.<sup>2</sup> Yet in so far as Spencer's study interprets *Hamlet* mainly from a historic background it tends to affect our reaction to the play, as it were, at a remove. The full impact of Copernicus, Montaigne, Machiavelli, is not now directly felt, but that of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is an ever-present reality. Spencer's book succeeds as criticism—as he is well aware—because it presents the background in retrospect, and in so doing manages to release some of the values by which the work of art transcends its own period. 'Shakespeare', as he puts it, 'was in touch with something more than his age.' When Spencer relates the central conflict in man to the appearance and reality theme so important in Shakespeare,<sup>3</sup> we may come to see that the theme has, besides metaphysical and moral implications, also a psychological aspect that carries significance. The question

<sup>1</sup>New York, 1942, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Perhaps influenced by that most absolute pronouncement of all, by T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 1920: 'the play is most certainly an artistic failure.' The statement seems contrary to the evidence. Few critics have questioned the greatness of *Hamlet*.

<sup>3</sup>Recently emphasised again by L. C. Knights in *Some Shakespearean Themes*, 1959.

of appearance and reality in man gives rise to a whole series of problems that can be defined by the word sincerity.

The question of what I really am, what I really mean, what I should be, is a universal human problem that can make itself felt on all kinds of levels. In its deepest sense it can be very perturbing, and as such it is also specifically a writer's problem. A comparatively simple illustration of this is provided by the figure of irony, which is inherent in this problem, but I have in mind something more fundamental. In literature there has of old been a much greater tension between subjective awareness and objective representation than in the other arts, and thus the problem tends to affect the writer more essentially.<sup>1</sup> When a writer is genuinely concerned with the meaning of experience, and its limitations, he finds himself in that very act confronted with the problem of sincerity. Autobiographical writings may emphasise it, so may purely imaginative; it certainly comes to the fore.<sup>2</sup> It proves to be very complicated indeed. Let us, for a moment, consider the romantic poets. With their stress on the uniqueness of the human personality we might expect to find them the prime exponents of sincerity in art. Indeed, sincerity finally becomes a criterion of art.<sup>3</sup> But what we actually find in the romanticists is not only great sincerity but also insincerity. This may be partly explained from the fact that the man and the writer tend to become separate,<sup>4</sup> but we may legitimately wonder how far such separateness can be wholly sincere. We may glimpse some of the complexities of the problem from the writer's point of view in Yeats. Yeats had received a letter from his father 'insisting on "intimacy" as the mark of fine literature'. At first the idea calls up its contrast,

<sup>1</sup>As the other arts have liberated themselves from certain 'objective' conventions, sincerity has become a problem there also, as in non-figurative art or free tonality in music. We might here invoke, without necessarily accepting his system, Maritain's paradox that there is a point where subjectivity and objectivity seem to meet: *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, New York, 1955 (especially Ch. I).

<sup>2</sup>We might think of Augustine and Pascal, and of Chaucer's Pardoner.

<sup>3</sup>Matthew Arnold in *The Study of Poetry*, 'the high seriousness that comes from absolute sincerity'.

<sup>4</sup>As argued, e.g. in Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Jung would have spoken of an 'autonomous complex'. cf., much more fundamentally, the 'fin de siècle' artists.

generalisation, which, Yeats says, 'creates rhetoric', and he adduces Kipling and Macaulay. 'Life is never the same twice and so cannot be generalised.'<sup>1</sup> But some three years later he returns to the problem in connection with an introduction he is writing:

I have got nearly all the thought down now on paper, but I shall have to spend a long time making it vivid to the sense and emotionally sincere. It is always such a long research getting down to one's exact impression, one's exact ignorance and knowledge. I remember your once writing to me, that all good art is good just in so far as it is intimate. It always seems to me that that intimacy comes only from personal sincerity. The hardest thing of all to get rid of is the affectation of knowledge which is contained in certain forms of words. If you write on a subject it is usual to assume that you know all the facts that are known and have all the necessary faculties to interpret them. Yet this assumption is never really true. I shall probably spend a good deal of time the next two or three months trying to give my readers an exact measure in these things.<sup>2</sup>

Yeats, then, in his struggle to objectify experience, rejects generalisation because it must be inaccurate. But he also realises that his true aim is perhaps unattainable. To be intimate is to be aware of the Other (the reader) and of the self, but to express the self—in so far as one could ever know it exactly—is to present a context that has in it the germs of insincerity. We can understand Yeats's preference for the symbol.

Now let us return to Shakespeare. He is a writer in whose work the meaning of human experience, the analysis of the realities of human life, have found expression as almost nowhere else. As his art betrays a progressive interest in the themes of appearance and reality, man as he should be and man as, perhaps, he is, it is unthinkable that, as a writer, he should not have been confronted with the problem of sincerity. It is difficult to say how it would have presented itself to him. Not, perhaps, in the first place as a problem of self-revelation—though it must be that also—but certainly as an essential first approach towards his exploration of the mystery of human existence. And since *Hamlet* represents the turning-point from a more external treatment of his themes to

<sup>1</sup>Compare Blake on *Reynolds' Discourses*: 'To Generalise is to be an Idiot. To Particularise is the Alone Merit. General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess.'

<sup>2</sup>*The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade, 1954, pp. 534 and 568.



one that is far more intimate, should we not expect to find in that play a key towards Shakespeare's view of the problem?

We are not yet finished with what must necessarily be a long introduction. For the general human problem of sincerity, which is what we are confronted with in the dramatic treatment of this subject, presents other aspects that have been analysed, and this analysis is not one that lends itself easily to incorporation in a discussion of the play. I refer here to the brilliant psychological analysis of the problem given by Sartre in *L'être et le néant*.<sup>1</sup> The chapter, *La mauvaise foi*, can be detached from the book as a whole and read separately; it is not, or so I think, necessary to see it as part of his system of philosophy. Sartre's starting-point, then, is the opposite of sincerity, 'la mauvaise foi', bad faith, a term that is perhaps a little stronger than insincerity, although the latter word often translates the idea equally well. He wonders how such a thing is at all possible. It can be distinguished from the lies which pose a truth hidden from the person to whom we lie. But how can I be really insincere, that is, deceive myself? The assumption of the subconscious does not ultimately provide a way out since in one form or another it leads to explanations that involve consciousness of the deception and, anyway, there are instances of insincere behaviour conducted apparently in full consciousness. He then proceeds to a discussion of such behaviour, and of sincere behaviour, for each of which I select one of his examples. The first is that of a near flirt, a girl accepting homage from her admirer without wishing to commit herself. Sartre describes how the young man takes her hand: this seems to call for a decision. The girl can either respond, but then she is committed, or she can disengage herself, which would, however, break the charm of the moment. In fact the girl does neither: she talks, very much the admirable young woman, and she forgets that she has a hand. That is 'la mauvaise foi'. The girl enjoys the tension of the moment, while at the same time denying that there is any.<sup>2</sup> The art

<sup>1</sup> Paris, 1943 (6<sup>e</sup> edition), pp. 85-III.

<sup>2</sup> There is a possibility of assuming a further complication in that the girl as a social being is not exclusively concerned with the present. In that case an ultimate sincerity may underlie this attitude, but that is not the point here.

is that of forming contradictory concepts. She is not really her hand, a body, she is something far more spiritual. Besides body and mind there are other concepts with which we may play the same game: my view of myself and somebody else's (I am not really the man you think I am), and my past and present self (in a sense I am the man I was, but not really).

However, when we come to sincerity we see much the same situation. Consider a waiter in a restaurant, his solicitude, his gestures, his way of walking. The man is obviously playing at something and enjoying himself. What does he play at? He plays at being a waiter, that is exactly what he wants to be. But in so far as he acts the part it is clear that he is really something else. Or rather he is not a mere actor but a constantly changing human being. As a waiter he has to become what he is.<sup>1</sup>

Both attitudes, the sincere and the insincere, therefore imply that I deny that I am who or what I am. The difference is that the one becomes what he has to be, the other what he is not. It is exactly because sincerity is a constant journey towards the unattainable (what I am escapes me as I become it, because a complete identification is never possible) that insincerity is possible.

Finally Sartre arrives at a discussion of the real nature of bad faith, which he sees as a negative attitude utilising the nature of faith. It is a denial of a value that sincerity maintains. In the course of this argument he points out one result of bad faith that is most interesting: it offers the possibility of 'l'évidence non persuasive'. If a person starts from the assumption that nothing is what it is he cannot be persuaded. The phenomenon will be clear to anyone who has ever tried seriously to enter into an argument with a convinced communist, or fascist for that matter.

It is impossible to do justice to Sartre in a few paragraphs; this rendering reflects neither the subtlety of psychological argument

<sup>1</sup>That is also a writer's position. But it will be clear, just as in the case of the waiter, that the underlying attitude may very well turn out to be one of self-deception, that is, insincerity. Nor need either attitude be constant. Sartre speaks of 'la mauvaise foi' as being essentially unstable ('metastable'). Thus it is possible to understand the deception of Coleridge, whose account of the origin of *Kubla Khan*, it seems, simply cannot be true, and also the vacillation that is one of the things to puzzle us in D. H. Lawrence.

nor his careful philosophical formulation. But we may now ask how these main points can help us to understand *Hamlet*. This is clearly not a matter of demonstrating Shakespeare's debt to Sartre. Shakespeare worked with the means at hand, and what we have come to know about the concepts of his own day—such as melancholy—is of great value. The polarity, also, of contemplation and action, so important to the Elizabethans, must be borne in mind. But Shakespeare's 'melancholy' is not to be explained only in terms of Timothy Bright, and within his larger framework there may be an awareness of aspects of the human mind which the above considerations may help to explain.

It is perhaps dangerous to suggest a debt to subject-matter, for we do not know how far Shakespeare was a free agent in this respect, nor do we know the form of the earlier play that he may have handled. But the source-material that we do know presents, amidst much treachery, a hero who is compelled to assume a role. What appears to be Shakespeare's addition to this material, the players and *The Murder of Gonzago*, implies the theme of sincerity.

Treachery is not exactly the same as bad faith, but the form in which it appears here certainly involves insincerity and also some instances of bad faith. Claudius and Laertes are not merely cynical liars, and to arrange for a fatal 'accident' is surely to disclaim candour. The character of Hamlet is more complex. On the whole he seems to present self-exploration in the face of the great problems of life and death. He might even be regarded as the representation of the ever-changing self that escapes definition. But on further consideration we must surely see him in his procrastination as guilty of self-deception. It might even be suggested that his less sympathetic qualities, his railings, his callousness, are the reflections of a fundamental insincerity which he is unable to overcome. There are also contrasting characters, Fortinbras being an obvious example. It is true that he deceives his uncle, but he returns to accept his well-deserved rebuke, and makes so honest an impression that he is allowed after all to perform the undertaking that had first been his pretext. The other contrast, less

striking but none the less positive, is Horatio, the constant friend.

Thus the twin themes of sincerity and insincerity are of importance in the structure of the play. It may be said that the whole of the first act consists of the presentation of ambiguous material, which becomes only partly clarified as the play moves on. The uncertainty and confusion of the first scene have often been commented on, and they set the tone of the play. In contrast the second scene seems peaceful and orderly, with the exception of the figure of Hamlet. His first utterance shows him to be very quick in repartee, yet his whole appearance bears the stamp of grief and dejection. He emphasises the sincerity of these feelings, 'Seems, madam! nay it is, I know not "seems"'. Referring to his dress and behaviour he continues, 'these indeed seem, For they are actions that a man might play. But I have that within which passes show.' His first monologue, too, appears simply as an expression of grief and outraged feeling at the behaviour of his mother, and even in the light of what follows there is not a breath of suspicion (unless it be the 'most unrighteous tears'). But the comments of Claudius and, in view of these, the continuation of the scene into the meeting with Horatio might make us pause a moment. In the setting of the court Hamlet's grief is ostentatious, a demonstration, an attitude almost too severely maintained. But when he meets Horatio what happens is far more natural: Hamlet forgets his grief as he greets his friend. His remark, 'We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart' (I,2,75),<sup>1</sup> holds out, for all its dramatic irony, a suggestion of conviviality. Only when Horatio mentions his father's funeral does Hamlet return to his wrongs, and then in a more bitter and more intellectual way. His later interrogation of the soldiers on the appearance of the ghost is again shrewd and shows no sign of dejection. When we contrast the two attitudes, we may feel that there is something slightly theatrical about Hamlet's grief in Court. The situation is complex; besides grief and the shock of his mother's conduct there is perhaps thwarted ambition to be reckoned with (about which Hamlet himself is

<sup>1</sup>Throughout quotations and references are taken from the edition of John Dover Wilson, Cambridge, 1934.



then, perhaps significantly, silent). But we cannot escape from the suggestion of something like self-pity, an insincerity, however slight, in his behaviour.

It is in the third scene that this note of insincerity is openly, though at first tentatively, heard. Laertes expresses doubts about Hamlet's intentions towards Ophelia, which we have difficulty in reconciling with the serious young man we have just seen. These doubts do not necessarily indicate an 'earlier' Hamlet who was different. We may perhaps regard them as setting up a standard of more cheerful, more irresponsible, but also more natural behaviour which might be expected of a man in Hamlet's position. Ophelia banteringly suggests that Laertes might not be so very sincere himself, and there follows the full blast of Polonius's advice to his son, full of a pompous sincerity that is to acquire ironic significance with the beginning of the second act.

The first act brings the exposition to a close with the ghost's full relation of the preliminary matter, and his command to Hamlet to avenge his father. The Ghost is a most ambiguous figure; indeed it is possible to make his ambiguity into one of the basic elements of the plot.<sup>1</sup> But from our psychological point of view we may let the character of the Ghost rest, since it would be at best a matter for psychic research. What matters more to us are the reactions of Hamlet. Here we begin to observe something peculiar. In the first place this waiting Hamlet makes certain reflections. Danish drinking habits lead him on to ponder on the fortune of individuals; 'So oft it chanceth in particular men' (I,4,23). The speech has wide implications, which no one is likely to underestimate. But seen for a moment purely and simply as a revelation of Hamlet's character we may regard it in the context as inspired by thoughts about the old king, whom Hamlet regards as, above all, virtuous. Yet now that his ghost is seen to walk it must be assumed that there is something wrong. Hamlet does not know what revelation to expect, and it seems as if he is thinking of some unexpiated crime. It is as if he is trying to reassure himself, to cushion the shock—not guilty, some

<sup>1</sup>Cp. B. Joseph, *Conscience and the King; a Study of 'Hamlet'*, 1953.

complexion, some habit, some defect—but at the same time he seems to be preparing to give up altogether the idealised picture that he had of his father, ‘the dram of evil Doth all the noble substance of a doubt To his own scandal’. We may suspect Hamlet of a fundamental distrust in what experience is to bring.

More curious still is Hamlet’s reaction after the revelation. On the one hand he promises ‘thy commandment all alone shall live Within the book and volume of my brain’ (I,5,102), but on the other hand what he sets down in his tables is: ‘That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.’ This is ambiguous. Hamlet promises to be at the same time the man of action and the man of contemplation. In the following ‘Revengers’ Oath’ he commands not action, but silence, and he prepares his companions for what is to follow by mentioning an ‘antic disposition’. We shall see how later the ideas of action and contemplation acquire a certain ambivalence in his mind. For the moment it is the thought of duplicity and distrust that is uppermost in his mind, and the game that is to be played is that of ‘I am not really the man you think I am’.

It is a stroke of genius on Shakespeare’s part to open the second act with Polonius’s instructions to Reynaldo. They place the earlier leave-taking speech in a very curious light. There a high standard of honesty and sincerity was set, creating an atmosphere of complete trust between father and son. Here not only does the fact of spying on the son take away the effect of trust, but the very manner of this spying is charged with the utmost perfidy. There is no indication that Polonius has undergone a change of heart towards his son, and we are thus made to telescope the actions of the two scenes into one fundamental attitude, which is one of bad faith.<sup>1</sup> Nor is Polonius more sincere towards his daughter. He begins by suspecting Hamlet’s intentions, like Laertes, without

<sup>1</sup>It is remarkable that so many of the set speeches in Shakespeare (cp. Jacques on the seven ages of man, Ulysses on degree, Hamlet on the nature of man) are found in an ironic setting. This does not, I think, mean that their traditional wisdom is necessarily to be questioned, but rather that they are thus not offered categorically. Shakespeare leaves us our freedom to ponder, to accept or reject, in part or as a whole.

more ado, in spite of Ophelia's protestations, and forbids her to speak to him. But no sooner does he see a chance of pressing a marriage, on hearing Ophelia's story of Hamlet's visit, than he hurries to the king, merely giving himself time to renounce his former suspicions and fears of presumptuousness. He does not seriously consider Ophelia's account, or wonder about it: all he wants is a good story. This, as well as the later treatment of the figure, where he is made to appear ridiculous, may make us think that his 'bad faith' is of a superficial kind, or even that Polonius is a comic figure, and does not matter very much. That is how Shakespeare makes us gloss over his death. But for all Polonius knows, Hamlet may really be mad, and Polonius does not object to his daughter marrying a madman so long as he is a Prince. At this stage in the play Polonius objectifies bad faith in action.

We may now turn to the character of Ophelia. The point here is that though madness and suicide may play a part in Hamlet's thoughts these things actually happen to Ophelia. The stress-pattern implied here is indicated by the songs she sings and the flowers she hands out. They say quite clearly that it is Hamlet's rejection of her love and the death of her father that cause her to lose her hold on life. In the beginning of the play her character is more ambiguous, and she has been convincingly described as a 'fast' girl and as the very essence of innocence. As to this last we may perhaps say that there is an innocence that is not of the body. But she has also been accused of allowing herself to be used to betray Hamlet, and while the facts are undeniable, her attitude may perhaps be differently explained.

The one insincerity of which I personally suspect Ophelia is in the story that she tells to her father. I know very well that in a play it is one of the conventions that we must, unless there are clear counter-indications, take a character's word for what happens off the stage. Yet in this one case I am not sure. The description of Hamlet smells of the text-book—so much so that if we do not take the story to be fictitious we may accuse Hamlet of copying the book to mislead others. To her father's question 'Mad for thy love?' Ophelia readily answers 'My lord, I do not know, but

truly I do fear it', and there follows a further elaboration. Would it not be possible to see her story as a ruse to re-establish contact with Hamlet? This type of approach seems to me a truly feminine one.

However this may be, the way she tackles Hamlet when they meet, premeditated and in a way insincere though it is, points to a fundamental confidence in Hamlet and sincerity in her love for him. But with true psychological insight Shakespeare has given her a typically feminine approach to the problem that leads to a tragic outcome. What she wants is reassurance, she wants her lover back, and to her the best way to obtain this result is to offer to return Hamlet's presents. These, she is sure, he will not take back. Nor does he, but he misinterprets, as nearly every male will, the negative approach. It is an ironical tragedy that we may see enacted, in little, every day of our lives. 'I shan't need anything new for that party, shall I?'—'No, dearest, I think you looked perfectly lovely in that blue thing the other night. I like you in blue.' That is the answer of the honest male, but the woman's answer, the one that is expected, is that she cannot possibly think of wearing that old dress again. So here: Ophelia wants Hamlet to say—in the presence of witnesses—that he still loves her, and she presents what is to her the perfect setting for this. But Hamlet misunderstands, he is offended and ungracious; his distrust is aroused and he may see her offer as the final gesture of farewell of a girl who has found a new lover. His ranting must be seen in the light of what has been happening to himself. But Ophelia's complaint shows the idealised picture of Hamlet that she had, and the shock that his loss means to her. We may explain her ultimate madness as stemming from the loss of all positive values.

We are given to understand more than once in the play that Hamlet's madness is a pretence by means of which he hopes to deceive the king. There are good grounds for this attitude, because, knowing what he does, he cannot be sure that he will not be the king's next victim, quite apart from any suspicions that Claudius may have of Hamlet wishing to avenge his father.



To appear an 'innocent' is therefore to his advantage. As far as the play is concerned, however, this leads immediately to a complexity that is difficult to unravel, because any utterance of Hamlet from now on is ambiguous. The exceptions are the monologues and his words to Horatio, whom he explicitly trusts. What we try to do, then, is to build up a consistent interpretation by separating what is sincere from what is assumed in his character. We have come to see, however, that the appearances of sincerity and insincerity are very much alike and sometimes not distinguished by the subject himself, who hides, as it were, behind a double identity. We must also argue that the time-lapse suggested by the Polonius-Reynaldo scene is filled by Hamlet in establishing his character as a madman and not as a revenger. It is here, therefore, in what is not in the play, that the problem of the procrastination has its roots. And, as elsewhere, what Shakespeare has left out has filled volumes of criticism. For our information we have to turn to what follows, that is especially the monologues 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I' (II,2,552), 'To be or not to be' (III,1,56) and the words to Horatio (III,2,54).

In the first of these monologues Hamlet contrasts the performance of the player with his own. The occasion is the action immediately preceding, where Hamlet begins a speech on the death of Priam, which is taken up by the player with such professional sincerity that Hamlet is, as it were, swept off the boards.<sup>1</sup> It is the contrast between the amateur and the professional. Hamlet is struck by the fact that the actor, in a fictitious situation, puts on a much more real show than, in the reality of life, Hamlet has done in his own just cause. He continues by ranting about his own cowardice, then stops short, and explains why he wanted the players to put on *The Murder of Gonzago* with an inserted speech. This is to make Claudius betray himself, for after a fleeting thought that he might 'proclaim (his) malefactions' that is the saner expectation he allows himself. Then he will know that the Ghost was not a devil as his story will have been confirmed.

The argument of this monologue contradicts itself: at the

<sup>1</sup>Thus A. G. H. Bachrach, *Naar het hem Leek*, Den Haag, 1957.

outset the story of the Ghost is accepted as a fact, at the end it is seen as a possible delusion. Moreover Hamlet equates the acting of a part by the player not with his own assumed role, but with the acting of the part of a revenger. Unlike the player, Hamlet does not try to become what he is: the player is sincere, but Hamlet is not. It is this recognition that makes him call himself a coward. He fastens on this feeling, which at least he takes to be sincere, and acts it out until he realises that sincerity has once more escaped him: 'Why, what an ass am I.' The true conclusion of this argument would seem to be that he should now seriously shoulder the responsibility of revenge. But having proved to his own satisfaction that he is not really a coward, that he is using mere words, Hamlet is able to return to his assumed personality, and he continues on the course he had already mapped out, with the palpable excuse that he needs confirmation.

Here we can see something of the ironic situation in which Hamlet has become involved. He has started by playing a part, and this prevents him from ever being himself. Besides, the playing of the part involves distrust, in that the disguise may be penetrated. At the end of the first act he had formulated his aim as the restitution of order: 'The time is out of joint, O cursed spite That ever I was born to set it right.' Instead of moving towards this goal, however, he is being steadily let into a situation where the sincerity of his actions must become doubtful, where no trust is possible, and where all values are confused.

If Hamlet's ravings to Ophelia mean anything, they display a horror of the insincerity of all human relationships, of the lack of meaning in life. That attitude is also evinced by the preceding monologue 'To be or not to be'. This speech derives its great significance from the fact that it questions essential values, wondering whether they are what they are. The tenor of the monologue is not so much the fear of death as the fear of life. The one way of ending trouble is to die, and that may not end the trouble. It is as if all change is equated with the last decisive change, death, and all life is an unchanging anguish. We are reminded of his challenge of the traditional concept of man in

his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This unhappiness may be seen as the result of his loss of positive values when he recognises the insincerity of others and of his lack of confidence (the reflex of insincerity) in himself. The particular grief of the first monologue in the play has been turned into a general attitude towards life.

It need not surprise us, then, that the ensuing scene with Ophelia releases in him horror at the essential insincerity and meaninglessness of all human relationships. We have seen how he may regard her, too, as faithless, and in the assumption of madness he vents feelings he regards as essentially sincere but which a sane man would leave unsaid. 'I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me.' (III, I, 122) True enough, but the next step, which would reveal a respect and indeed awe for the normal balance in man, is one that Hamlet does not, and cannot now take.

Instead it is all he can do to cling to his identity, and this is reflected by his not very real concept of the security of a constant and unchanging self, which he projects on his friend Horatio, 'for thou hast been As one in suff'ring all that suffers nothing'. To change is, as it were, to disappear, and hence his fear of being played upon, as appears from the image of the 'pipe' or the recorder, found here and in the later conversation with Guildenstern (III, 2, 348 ff.), 'a pipe for Fortune's finger to sound what stop she please', and, 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?'. The awareness that it is not so much a matter of man being changed by the experience as of man changing the experience does not enter into it. And so for Hamlet there is no turning back.

The play within the play at the climax of *Hamlet* voices the main theme again; protestations of constancy that will prove to be insincere, and, in the action, the poison in the ear which we may now recognise as a symbol. We kill one another with 'kindness'. In the immediate release of the action in what follows, Shakespeare heaps irony on irony. As before in the case of Hamlet's

decision to put on the play, Shakespeare demonstrates insincerity by showing action as preceding reflection. Claudius at once takes measures to deal with Hamlet, but a little later he seems moved, momentarily, to face up to the problem of his crime. It happens that Hamlet comes upon him as he is attempting to pray and thus finds the way open to his revenge.

The irony here is not only that Hamlet's excuse for not killing Claudius is dispatched in the two final lines spoken by the king, but that Hamlet himself is unaware of what holds him back. Again and again critics have felt the insincerity of his speech ('Now could I do it pat,' III,3,73), and have guessed at what real causes might be operative. It is certainly not that Hamlet shrinks from murdering a defenceless man; he would prefer, so he says, to kill him drunk asleep. It is rather as if Hamlet's own mental condition, his fundamental distrust of all things and of himself, plays him false. We may see his choice here as an instance of 'l'évidence non persuasive'. Hamlet unexpectedly finds waiting for him the perfect opportunity for his revenge, and it is exactly because it is so perfect that he feels there must be something wrong with it. Presently the Ghost will return to charge him with a 'blunted purpose'.

In that scene the irony is continued, when Hamlet, having been so near the completion of his task, belatedly goes through the movements of it and kills Polonius. In spite of extenuating circumstances it is a bad business. To Hamlet it does not seem to matter much, and that is perhaps one of the marks of bad faith as faith, the ambiguity of 'there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so'. Nothing need matter very much because there is always the excuse (and this is also the excuse of the war-criminal) that it is not the real self that is responsible. Quite unabashed Hamlet continues his self-imposed task of telling his mother what she is 'really' doing. There is perhaps irony again in the effect that his words seem to have on her—to what ultimate extent we do not know. But there is bad faith again when Hamlet expresses regret about the death of Polonius, 'I will bestow him and will answer well The death I gave him'. (III,4,176) It is the mad



Hamlet again who stows away the body and offers little aid in its recovery. There is no attempt to 'answer', to accept responsibility.

The central episode representing Hamlet's virtual failure is flanked by his two attempts to analyse his case, once after the confrontation with the player, and now on the encounter with the troops of Fortinbras (IV,4). In both he comes to a fleeting recognition of his state, but the second case is far less clear than the first. It is contained in the conclusion—reached after much self-reproach—that 'rightly to be great Is not to stir without great argument, But greatly to find quarrel in a straw When honour's at the stake'. It seems to mean that action, fighting, is not in itself a virtue, but that the cause may make it great. Much is hidden here in the difficult word honour. In so far as it may contain an element of moral rectitude or indignation it means that Hamlet recognises he had not become personally involved in his cause. But honour also contains a subjective element; one man may see it where another does not, and in so far it is the man who determines the event and not the other way round. Whatever the truth that Hamlet glimpsed, he does not act upon it. His return, as Shakespeare works it out, is due to chance and not to his own determination.

Before we come to the end of the play Shakespeare gives us one last aspect of his theme, sincerity in the face of death. In the graveyard scene Hamlet is confronted with death in its impersonal and its personal aspect. Death is the great equaliser: beauty and intellect, sincerity and insincerity must all come to the same end and cease to be, as the persons in whom we have known them. But death is also a great falsifier of the emotions. The respect and gratitude for the living mystery we are now no longer to experience is too easily drowned by a personal concern that is an insincerity towards the past. The grief of Laertes is a demonstration of personal wrong, and Hamlet's outburst in competition with him makes matters worse. Would Hamlet have said as much to the living Ophelia? The quarrel in the grave symbolises this personal concern of the living, which offends the mystery of life and death.

Some critics have tried to see a change in Hamlet at the end of the play. They point to the lines, 'There's a divinity that shapes

our ends, Rough-hew them how we will' (V,2,10). Superficially these words seem to indicate the recognition of a positive force that aids us in our journey through life. The context, however, gives them the lie. They are used as a parenthesis in the beginning of the story of the forged instructions which are to cost Rosencrantz and Guildenstern their lives. Used in this way they form once more an excuse for the murder of these former friends, an act that, whichever way we look at it, seems unnecessary. But it is not important that Hamlet himself should change and come to a full awareness of the ironic theme of his life and death. What is important is that in the manner of his death the positive human values that are at stake shall be vindicated. Of that Shakespeare, and not Hamlet, takes care. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have represented an aspect of insincerity, die, as had Polonius and Ophelia. So many deaths in this play, but they must be. In the last scene of all, Shakespeare triumphantly sweeps all his masks from the stage, and life is to be carried on by the bewildered Horatio and by Fortinbras. In our sympathy with Hamlet we are given the satisfaction that in the end, for the one moment, he has become the avenger that he had hoped he was.

The theme of sincerity is not the whole of *Hamlet*, nor can it supply a neat system in which every problem is nicely solved. But it does reveal a deeply human aspect of the tragedy, and helps us to see why it should answer to a need in ourselves. The variations on the theme are omnipresent, from the slight subterfuge to essential malignity, but its centre is found in Hamlet, whose tragedy it is that, caught by his willing co-operation in the web of pretence, he is inevitably involved until he cannot extricate himself and becomes the exponent of the vice he fights. To the dramatist Shakespeare it was important that he should work out in this play how one of our ways of dealing with the problem of evil is to misrepresent it. To show both the good and the bad in man, it is necessary to see that they are really there. In his later tragedies Shakespeare could analyse the operation of these forces, because in *Hamlet* he had been able to recognise both their shadow and their substance.

# *A Nation's Odyssey: The Novels of Hugh MacLennan*

GEORGE WOODCOCK

HUGH MacLennan's first novel, *Barometer Rising*, appeared in 1941. During the two decades since then he has reached a position of uneasy prominence in Canadian letters. Other Canadian writers, like Stephen Leacock, Mazo de la Roche and Morley Callaghan, have established wider international reputations; others again, like Thomas B. Costain and the ineffable Ralph Connor, have gained more of the ambiguous popularity of the best seller. And during the past twenty years a number of novels have been written in Canada which are recognised as individually superior to the best of MacLennan; Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, Brian Moore's *Judith Hearne*, and Ethel Wilson's *Equations of Love* come at once to mind. Yet many Canadian critics, if they were asked what novelist—in terms of total achievement—seemed to them most significant in Canada today, would probably name MacLennan, and would agree with Professor Hugo McPherson's statement in a recent essay that '*Barometer Rising* marks a major advance in Canadian fiction'.

The reasons for MacLennan's reputation, and for his undoubted importance as a novelist, are to be found in the original way in which he has interpreted the Canadian scene to his fellow countrymen rather than in any originality of approach to the art of the novel itself. Indeed, if we are concerned with fictional technique, one of the most striking characteristics of *Barometer Rising* and MacLennan's four later novels is their relative conservatism. They are unashamedly didactic; they rely heavily on environmental atmosphere and local colour; their characterisation is oversimplified and moralistic in tone; their language is descriptive

rather than evocative; and their action tends to be shaped externally by a Hardy-esque use of circumstance and coincidence. What does distinguish them is MacLennan's combination of theme and symbol—his development of the problems of individuals in an emerging nation by means of action built on a simple but powerful foundation of universal myth.

The myth is that of Odysseus translated into terms of modern living; the *Odyssey* itself was the product of a people in the process of becoming aware of itself, and, appropriately, the theme which MacLennan uses it to illuminate is the growth of a Canadian national consciousness. Indeed, the most striking—and in some ways the most jarring—feature of MacLennan's books is the degree to which the national theme in its various aspects forms an imposed pattern within which the lives of the characters tend to be worked out rather than working themselves out. In *Barometer Rising* it is the leap into a sense of national identity which MacLennan sees emerging among Canadians during the first World War; in *Two Solitudes* (1945) it is the clash of English and French traditions; in *The Precipice* (1948) it is the impact of American social mores on the Canadian consciousness; in *Each Man's Son* (1951) it is the lingering power in Canada of the Calvinist conscience; in *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959), MacLennan's most recent and massive novel, it is the dual influence—destructive and creative at once—of the social idealism of the thirties. This predominance of the national theme is a factor that must be taken into account in any attempt to understand MacLennan's work, since it bears a close relationship to his most evident weaknesses as a novelist, and also since its progressive assimilation into a fictionally viable form runs parallel to his growth towards maturity as a writer.

The expression of the theme in terms of the constant mythical structure is evident already in MacLennan's first novel. The setting of *Barometer Rising* is Halifax during the first World War. The novel opens as a young man returns secretly to the Nova Scotian capital. As the action progresses, it is revealed that he is an officer, Neil MacRae, whom his uncle Geoffrey Wain, also the colonel



of his battalion in France, had attempted to blame for the failure of an attack. By chance MacRae was bombed on the night before his court martial, given up for dead, but found by a relieving battalion and patched up without his real identity being discovered. Now he returns home, risking execution for cowardice, in the hope of collecting the evidence that will clear his name. Meanwhile, there still lives in Halifax the cousin, Penelope Wain, with whom he was in love before he went away to the wars; she, besides being a capable ship designer, is the daughter of Neil's enemy.

Wain and Penelope both learn of MacRae's presence in Halifax and, while the Colonel—who has been sent home in disgrace because of the unsuccessful attack—sets out to frustrate Neil's efforts and to get rid of him as quietly as possible, Penelope and a drunken but good-hearted M.O., Angus Murray, do their best to see that MacRae vindicates himself. But the situation reaches its climax, not through the efforts of the two parties, but through the great Halifax explosion of 1917, which overshadows the latter part of the novel. MacRae and Murray recover their self-respect by superhuman feats of endurance in relieving the victims, while Colonel Wain is providentially among the dead. Meanwhile, Alec MacKenzie, a primitive giant of a Cape Breton fisherman, gives on his death bed the evidence that will clear Neil MacRae and enable him to marry Penelope and assume parenthood of the child which, unknown to Neil, she had borne him while he was away in France.

The deliberate adaptation of the *Odyssey*, if it were not otherwise evident, is admitted by MacLennan not only in the name of his heroine, but also in MacRae's remark in the final chapter: 'Wise Penelope! That's what Odysseus said to his wife when he got home. I don't think he ever told her he loved her. He probably knew the words would sound too small.' But MacLennan not merely establishes in *Barometer Rising* a Homeric plot of the wanderer returning to a mysteriously changed homeland. He also uses for the first time a group of symbolic characters which will recur in various permutations in his later novels; the returning wanderer, the waiting woman, the fatherless child, the wise

doctor—sometimes transformed into the wise old man, and the primitive, violent, but essentially good giant. If we wish to seek a Homeric parallel, the quintet of Odysseus, Penelope, Telemachus, Mentor and Eumaeus seems obvious, though MacLennan is too good a writer to follow the pattern slavishly, and we shall see the relationships of these five basic characters changing from novel to novel until, in *The Watch that Ends the Night*, the wanderer, the wise doctor and the primitive giant are finally united in that super-Odysseus, Jerome Martell.

There are some satisfying things in *Barometer Rising*. The atmosphere—the very physical feeling—of Halifax four decades ago is admirably re-created, and the action moves with the right momentum towards the grand climax of the explosion. And this event is celebrated in a passage of fine reconstructive reporting which establishes at the outset the power of describing action in which MacLennan has always excelled. The later chapters narrating the rescue work are maintained at a level of sustained vigour, and the diminuendo from catastrophe to the saddened realisation of human happiness when Neil and Penelope are finally and fully reunited gives the appropriate last touch to the novel's balance.

But these virtues, which make *Barometer Rising* a constantly interesting book, are balanced by defects which are due partly to deficiencies in technique and partly to MacLennan's view of life and the world. For example, the relationship between the lovers is the least convincing of all the relationships in the novel because of a curiously embarrassed clumsiness which makes MacLennan incapable of dealing with any aspect of sex except in high-mindedly sentimental terms. It would be hard to find anything more self-conscious, in an otherwise naturally written book, than these paragraphs with which it draws to an end:

Suddenly Penny required his tenderness so greatly that it was as though all her life she had been starving for it. She wanted him to take her in his arms and hold her as he had done that unbelievable night in Montreal when nothing had existed but sounds in the darkness and the sense that each of them had been born for that moment. All this she wanted, but the habit of restraint, the cold control she had trained herself to acquire, was still unbreakable.

Neil made no effort to move up the road. He stood watching her, then came closer and his fingers touched her hair where it escaped over her temples. He gave a sudden smile, and all strain vanished from his face. . . .

Tears welled up in her eyes and receded without overflowing. And her fingers closed over his. He looked over her head to the patch of moonlight that broke and shivered in the centre of the Basin, and heard in the branches of the forest behind him the slight tremor of a rising wind.

This does not strike one as felt emotion; it is too obviously cobbled in the mind of an embarrassed author out of the stock clichés of romanticist fiction—tears, moonlight, sudden smiles, fingers touching temples and wind rising in the forest. Here, at any rate, MacLennan learnt little from Homer.

More serious, because it seems to spring from a philosophic fatalism perennial in MacLennan's attitude, is the mechanical impetus that at times—and particularly during the explosion—takes the action wholly out of the hands of the characters. MacLennan was a Classical scholar before he became a novelist, and a Calvinist before he became a Classicist, and the inexorable pattern of Greek tragedy still broods over his writing. Beyond a certain point, Penelope and Neil and Angus can no longer shape their fates, and it is not so much through the actions of the characters that the plot is finally worked out as through the apparent accident of the explosion, which takes on life and power to such an extent that Neil is really released from danger, not by proving his innocence, but because of the fortuitous justice of Geoffrey Wain, a man whose life was one extended *hubris*, being killed in a falling house.

The final flaw of *Barometer Rising* comes from the too articulate concern of the major characters with the destiny of Canada. There are times when this theme assumes a crude and abstract form which tears like a jagged spur into the unity of both feeling and style. When, for instance, Neil and Penelope are leaving the devastated city, at a time when we might expect the warmly personal thoughts of two young people united after so many vicissitudes, we are all at once faced with this passage in Neil's thoughts:

Why was he glad to be back? It was so much more than a man could ever put into words. It was more than the idea that he was young enough to see a great country move into its destiny. It was what he felt inside himself, as a Canadian who had lived both in the United States and England. Canada at present was called a nation only because a few laws had been passed and a railway line sent from one coast to the other. In returning home he knew that he was doing more than coming back to familiar surroundings. For better or worse he was entering the future, he was identifying himself with the still-hidden forces that were doomed to shape humanity as certainly as the tiny states of Europe had shaped the past. Canada was still hesitant. . . . But if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and his country would become the central arch which united the new order.

Perhaps these are worthy sentiments of an awakening patriotism, but their expression at this particular point of fulfilment in Neil's emotional life makes him seem an inhumanly and improbably cold lover.

MacLennan's second and third novels, *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice*, are even more dominated than *Barometer Rising* by the effort to create the arch of Canadian unity, and, because everything else in them is eventually subordinated to the elaboration of the national theme, they are the least successful of MacLennan's novels, in human understanding and formal cohesion alike.

*Two Solitudes* begins in a little Quebec village dominated partly by the priest, Father Beaubien, and partly by the seigneur, Athanase Tallard. Tallard is a politician with anti-clerical leanings who would like to see the material progress of western Canada spreading into Quebec. The latent conflict between him and the anti-English priest, a man of massive figure and obstinate mind, only becomes acute when Tallard is the means, first of bringing wise old Captain Yardley to one of the local farms, and then of interesting English Canadian financiers in the possibility of starting a mill in the village. The conflict is complicated by Tallard's relationship with his elder son, a French Canadian nationalist who is arrested as a deserter during the 1914-18 war and helps to arouse local hostility to his father. Finally, goaded by Father Beaubien's inflexible prejudices, Tallard renounces his



Catholicism; he is boycotted by his neighbours, his old friends, even his employees, and his English industrial partners desert him when they see that his unpopularity will harm their financial interests. Bankrupt and worn out with grief, he dies in Montreal; on his death bed he returns to the Church—and his neighbours accept him again when he returns, a failed Odysseus, to lie in their midst.

This first part of *Two Solitudes* has a close unity; it is bound together by the common anxieties of war and by the virtual identity of the larger problem of racial conflict with the actual lives and relationships of the characters. The problem seems to grow with the story rather than the story being fabricated to suit the problem, and the characters, Father Beaubien, Captain Yardley, the financier Huntly McQueen, Athanase himself, are up to this point well-knit and self-consistent. If *Two Solitudes* had ended with Tallard's death, it would have been a moving and cohesive book. But up to this point it merely presents the problem of racial relations; it does not have the logical completeness of presenting a solution, and this MacLennan seeks, at the expense of his novel, in its later chapters.

After Tallard's death the central character becomes his second son, Paul, a Telemachus fated to complete his father's unfinished Odyssey. Paul was sent to an English school when his father broke with the Church; as he points out, he can speak English without a French accent and French without an English accent, and so personifies racial reconciliation. Later, as a merchant seaman, Paul wanders far from Canada, but he returns, on the eve of the second World War, to marry his childhood friend, Captain Yardley's grand-daughter Heather. Finally, to show his hard-won sense of Canada as a united country, he defies his nationalist brother and volunteers.

MacLennan is so anxious to make his point that he is not content merely to show Paul as the obvious human symbol of two traditions united; at the end of the novel he actually steps out of the novelist's garment and assumes that of the social historian to deliver a final chapter of authorial reflection, not on the fate

of his characters, but on the destiny of the Canada they represent.

The conclusion of *Two Solitudes* is in fact contrived to fit a nationalist message, and this divides it so sharply from the earlier chapters that, while the story of Athanase seems written by a novelist acutely sensitive to concrete human predicaments, the story of Paul reads as if it were written by a man in whom this very kind of sensitiveness had been wholly submerged under the abstractions of a destiny-ridden view of history.

The same rather startling dichotomy is evident in *The Precipice*, MacLennan's least successful novel. In *The Precipice* the life of a sleepy and narrow-minded Ontario town, intended to represent Canada between the wars, is shown in opposition to the 'precipice' of New York, which attracts so many innocent Canadians to moral destruction. This is the only novel in which MacLennan's principal character is a woman, and his inability to penetrate the feminine with any profundity (an inability that may well be linked with Calvinist inhibitions he later analyses so well in *Each Man's Son*) is undoubtedly one of the principal reasons for its failure. The heroine, Lucy Cameron, is a mousy Jane Austenish young woman, caught in the narrow interests of her community and apparently destined to a perpetual spinsterhood in the company of her two sisters. But she meets a visiting American business man, Stephen Lassiter, and under his influence she blossoms astonishingly—for plainness changing under stimulation into breath-taking beauty is a predictable attribute of the MacLennan heroine. Eventually she runs away from her disapproving elder sister and marries Stephen in New York. They continue to live in that dangerous city, where Stephen becomes involved in the advertising world, until—despite Lucy's efforts to counter the baleful influence of urban life—the marriage breaks up. Lucy retires to Ontario with her children, while Stephen sets off on his miserable Odyssey, succumbing to over-educated sirens, running on to the rocks of business failure, until his nerve breaks and he is reunited with Lucy in a happy ending of excruciating banality.

Like *Two Solitudes*, *The Precipice* begins well; the early chapters

on the small-town life of the three sisters are alive, self-consistent and perceptive. But in New York, among the brassy glitter of familiar clichés on city life, the sense of an original world disappears, and the novel slumps into a stock romance in which Lucy, now a smug and irritating paragon, loyally supports Stephen, changed into a comic caricature of the ulcered ad-man, and finally, after many betrayals, nobly forgives all and consoles him in his downfall. As a tract it is doubtless admirable; as fiction it is extremely dull.

Again, the fault lies in the attempt to force a lesson, and one notices in *The Precipice*, as in *Two Solitudes*, how far the effort to work out a social problem in logical terms tends to weaken the mythical structure that MacLennan brings forward from *Barometer Rising*. In each of these intermediate novels we encounter again the Odyssean pattern of journey and return, and also, at least in part, the Homeric group of characters. But both plot and characters lose strength when the author seeks to state explicitly what should be suggested figuratively. And so the returns of Paul Tallard and Stephen Lassiter are less moving and less convincing than return of the Neil MacRae because they contain no element of mystery; nothing can grow from them because we know far too clearly what the author wishes them to mean.

In contrast to the novels that preceded it, *Each Man's Son* is a tensely constructed and well-unified book, in which the balance of theme and mythical structure is re-established. Central to the novel is the tragedy of the failing boxer, Archie MacNeil, and in the portrayal of Archie's world of prize fights and shabby gymnasias MacLennan writes with an extraordinary descriptive power. But Archie's fate, the fate of a basically good primitive in an environment of cynical exploitation, does not suggest the only theme of the novel; there is also the even stronger theme of Calvinist guilt, which afflicts Archie and all the other people of the little Cape Breton mining town from which he comes, but which appears most dramatically in the conflicts that plague Dr. Ainslie, the brilliant local surgeon whom conscience prevents from ever fulfilling his promise as a doctor and a man.

The structure within which MacLennan develops these two themes differs considerably from that used in *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice*. There he allowed the statement of a problem to be followed in chronological sequence by its solution, and the result was a linear pattern whose lack of inner tension undoubtedly contributed to the anti-climax into which both books eventually fell. In *Each Man's Son* MacLennan returns emphatically to the counterpointed pattern of the *Odyssey*. Life in the Cape Breton village, where Archie's wife Mollie and his son Alan await his return, alternates with Archie's own wandering adventures just as life on Ithaca alternates with the distant adventures of Odysseus. Mollie, like Penelope, is subject to many temptations. On one side there is Dr. Ainslie, whose mental agony is complicated by an emotional conflict with his wife, arising largely from their lack of children. He meets young Alan MacNeil and, realising his exceptional gifts, begins to take an interest in him, to educate him, until the child assumes in his mind the position of the son his wife cannot bear. Eventually, fearing Ainslie's influence will alienate Alan from her, Mollie opposes a continuation of the education plan, and listens to her other tempter, Camire, a glib little Frenchman who has settled in the village.

But the night Mollie gives herself to Camire is also the night on which the two paths of the novel run together, and the wanderer returns, a wrecked man going blind, but not too blind to see what is going on when he opens the cottage door. So the slaughter in the great hall of Ithaca is repeated in miniature. Archie kills Camire, mortally wounds Mollie, and falls in a stroke from which he quickly dies. Alan, the terrified witness of it all, is left completely alone, and, now that all the intervening characters have so providentially been swept away, Ainslie can at last claim the boy as his own.

The tragedy is almost grotesquely inevitable. As in his earlier works, MacLennan cannot avoid seeing life running in the lines of Greek tragedy, and the mechanics of a classical destiny grind their pattern all too heavily and harshly on the human weakness of his characters. Yet this incorporation of destiny, with its



corresponding weakening of the sense of human freedom, is not entirely inappropriate in a novel so permeated with the ambient darkness of Calvinist guilt. For the people MacLennan creates, destiny is an inner reality, and so for once the novelist's own fatalism accords with his subject. MacLennan suggests with powerful effectiveness the fear that always seems to overtop hope in the hearts of his Cape Bretoners, and he portrays equally effectively the relationships of classes and persons in a little society bound together by a common faith in its own damnation. MacLennan himself comes from Cape Breton, and it is likely that the immediacy one feels in this novel, the tension that unites structure and theme and myth, and makes the characters convincingly human even when they are most the slaves of circumstance, stems from its closeness to his own experience.

When we come to *The Watch that Ends the Night*, MacLennan's largest and most ambitious novel, we are reminded immediately of *Barometer Rising*, for here again a *revenant* comes back from the battles of life and the shadow of death to the haunts of his youth. But, once beyond this common starting-point, MacLennan's first and his most recent novel diverge on their separate errands. In *Barometer Rising* the action really centres around the efforts of Neil MacRae to claim his rightful place among the living. But Jerome Martell in *The Watch that Ends the Night* comes home from the Nazi torture chambers—by way of a long pilgrimage through Russia and China—only, like the original Odysseus, to renew his wanderings. His return, in fact, is important most of all for its effect on his former wife Catherine, and on George Stewart, the lover from childhood whom she married after hearing the false reports of Martell's death. For years Catherine and George have lived in the quiet campus security of a present which seems sealed off from the more destructive acids of memory. And then George rings up a number which the college porter has given him and—as he hears Jerome's forgotten voice—finds himself in the echoing tunnel that leads towards a past he had thought done with for ever.

By this means *The Watch that Ends the Night* becomes a novel

constructed in receding vistas of time, and in handling the leaps of memory MacLennan's craftsmanship is unobtrusively sure. We retreat with George—who in his role of narrator acts as a sensitive intermediary recording the effects of Jerome's return on others as well as himself—first into the childhood in which, by regarding Catherine as a girl rather than an invalid, he gives her the confidence of her own femininity. Time surges forward to the thirties, the Depression and Spain and the Leftist Dream, and Jerome appears with them, an idealistic surgeon, deft with a scalpel and crushing with an argument, a figure larger than life who bursts dramatically into George's memory in the middle of that fateful telephone conversation:

He was right in front of me now, Jerome Martell in the mid-Thirties, ugly-handsome with muscular cheeks, a nose flattened by an old break, hair cropped short because it defied a brush, a bulldog jaw, nostrils ardent like those of a horse, mouth strongly wide and sensual, but the eyes young, hungry and vulnerable, quick to shame as a boy's, charming with children and the weak, quarrelsome with the strong. There he was, that oddly pure sensualist so many experimenting women had desired, the man so many of us had thought of as wonderful in those depression years when we were all outcasts.

Jerome, though not technically the hero of *The Watch that Ends the Night*, is a figure in the heroic mould, the wanderer and the giant and the medicine man all in one, an energumen in the thirties, a man of sorrows and saintly wisdom in the fifties, who seems for most of the novel too far above common clay to be either true or tolerable unless we accept him as myth incarnate. Yet there is one point at which even Jerome becomes authentically human; that is when another tunnel of time opens up and takes us back into the New Brunswick woods, to the childhood of a boy born of an illiterate Central European immigrant and brought up in the primitive turn-of-the-century logging camps where his mother works as cook. The mother is murdered by one of her lovers; the boy escapes down-river and is adopted by a simple-minded pastor who finds him starving on a railway station. This part of the book is written as admirably as MacLennan has ever written of primitive action; the woods of New Brunswick take shape in one's mind as a distinct physical presence,

different from any other woods one has ever read of or walked in, and the night scene in the sleeping camp when the boy escapes from the murderer is powerfully thrilling.

At the end of *The Watch that Ends the Night* Jerome dispenses his wisdom and departs for the west. The shock of his return has shortened Catherine's life so that she is now an obviously dying woman, but Jerome has enabled her and George to find themselves, to face their pasts, and to wait tranquilly in a world of gathering shadows for death. In fact, in a sense he has passed them through death, and so the three main characters become united at that key point of the Odysseus myth, the descent into the underworld that precedes rebirth into the sunlight.

There is a flavour of pietistic smugness about this ending which is hard to accept; there is also, throughout *The Watch that Ends the Night*, a suave mawkishness in talking about sex which amounts almost to diplomatic evasion. MacLennan still suffers from his Calvinist background. But, granting such shortcomings, granting also the difficulty one experiences in really believing in Jerome, *The Watch that Ends the Night* is still a novel that impresses one for a number of reasons—its craftsmanly construction, its descriptive power, its ambitious grasp of the variety of Canadian social situations, from the primitive logging camp to the set of fellow-travelling academics, from the Halifax manse to the Anglophile boarding school and the C.B.C. and the Ministry of External Affairs.

In mid-career, MacLennan is still clearly developing as a novelist. His didacticism, which will probably never leave him, is at least presented now with a discreet indirection; his fatalism has largely acquired meaning in terms of the content of his novels—it is a fatalism proceeding rather from within his characters than from the world outside. He has, in other words, largely neutralised some of his most evident defects as a writer of fiction. It is true that his handling of any kind of sexual relationship remains almost as clumsily romanticist as ever it was; indeed, in this respect *The Watch that Ends the Night* is a regression from *Each Man's Son*. On the other hand, in his three successful novels,

*Barometer Rising*, *Each Man's Son* and *The Watch that Ends the Night*, he has steadily widened and varied his portrayal of the character of Canadian life. Ultimately, perhaps, he is best as a social novelist, using his central myth to demonstrate the underlying universality of the personal and national experiences he recreates. And doubtless it is this function that really explains the consideration we accord him. Few Canadian critics, even among those who praise him, would seriously claim him as a great writer adept at exploring the intricacies of the human heart and mind; most accept him as the best example of a kind of novelist that may be necessary in Canada today, the kind of novelist who interprets a rapidly maturing society to its own people in the same way as Dickens and Balzac interpreted the society of the industrial revolution to the English and the French a hundred years ago. MacLennan may not have the variety or the abounding vigour or the sheer greatness of texture shared by these imperfect giants (though he does have their shameless sentimentality), yet in his way he is of their kind, and no writer has yet come nearer to writing a Canadian *Comédie Humaine*.

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# *The Intricate Alliance:* *The Novels of R. K. Narayan*

WILLIAM WALSH

IT is odd at a time when we are beginning to pay attention to Commonwealth writers that a writer of the character and maturity of R. K. Narayan should hardly have been noticed at all. It is true that some of the more obvious motives directing us to these writers probably do not operate in respect of Narayan. His themes are not particularly contemporary, fashionable or provocative. Except for Gandhi's 'Quit India' campaign in *Waiting for Mahatma*, and even here the interest isn't primarily political, politics, especially racial politics, figure very little in his work. Nor does his language work with the peasant vigour which we are apt to find so attractive in the West Indians, our current novelists having elected, either from inclination or simply helplessness, to restrict themselves to very few of the language's possibilities. Narayan uses a pure and limpid English, easy and natural in its run and tone, but always an evolved and conscious medium, without the exciting, physical energy—sometimes adventitiously injected—that marks the writing of the West Indians. Narayan's English, in its structure and address, is a moderate, traditional instrument but one abstracted from the context in which it was generated—the history, the social condition, the weather, the racial memory—and transferred to a wholly different setting—brutal heat and hovering vultures, flocks of brilliant, glistening parrots, jackals rippling over the rubbish dumps, an utter shining clarity of light and the deadly grey of an appalling poverty. It is clear of the palpable suggestiveness, the foggy taste, the complex tang, running through every phrase of our own English. What it has instead is a strange

degree of translucence. Unaffected by the opacity of a British inheritance or by the powerful, positive quality of a language which as we use it can never be completely subordinated to our private purposes, Narayan's language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, an Indian sensibility.

By now Narayan is the author of a fairly substantial body of fiction, some eight or nine novels, all of them remarkably even in the quality of their achievement. The exception is *Mr. Sampath*, a treatment of the zany Indian film industry, which is both uncertain in intention and queerly hump-backed in shape. The world established in these novels (although 'established' is too harsh a term for the delicate skill in implication everywhere evident) impresses the reader with its coherence, its personal stamp and idiom. The action is centred in the small town of Malgudi in Mysore—small by Indian standards, that is—and although the physical geography is never dealt with as a set piece but allowed to reveal itself beneath and between the events, one comes to have a strong feeling for the place's identity. The detail suggests, surely and economically, the special favour of Malgudi, a blend of oriental and pre-1914 British, like an Edwardian mixture of sweet mangoes and malt vinegar—a wedding with its horoscopes and gold-edged, elegantly printed invitation cards; tiny shops with the shopkeeper hunched on the counter selling plantains, betel-leaves, snuff and English biscuits; the casuarina and the Post Office Savings Bank; the brass pots and the volumes of Milton and Carlyle; the shaved head and ochre robes of the *sanyasi* and Messrs. Binns's catalogue of cricket bats. Especially is this true of the detail of the public life, of the shabby swarming streets and the stifling bye-lanes, the cobbles of Market Road and the sands on Sarayu bank, the banyan tree outside the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank (built in 1914), the glare of Kitson lamps and the open drain down Vinayah Mudali Street. Even the names strengthen this double quality: Nallappa's Grove and Albert College, Mill Street and the Bombay Ananda Bhavan—a restaurant, Kabir Street and Lawley Extension, the Mempi Hills and the Board School; while Malgudi Station is both

Euston and the East and the Krishna Medical Hall both ancient and modern medicine.

But although these novels convey so full and intimate a sense of place, they are not in any limiting way regional. They send out long, sensitive feelers to the villages where the inhabitants are 'innocent and unsophisticated in most matters excepting their factions and fights', and to the cities where they are 'so mechanical and impersonal'. They concern themselves too with such varied spheres of interest as business, education, journalism, film-making, money-lending. One mustn't, of course, exaggerate this matter of the scope of reference. Narayan does work by focusing his attention sharply. Part of his strength is never to ignore his instinct for limitation. But he has the serious artist's gift for achieving representativeness by concentration. His preoccupation is with the middle class, a relatively small part of an agricultural civilisation and the most conscious and anxious part of the population. Its members are neither too well off not to know the rub of financial worry nor too indigent to be brutalised by want and hunger. They may take their religion more easily than the passionately credulous poor but even in those with a tendency towards modernity one is always aware under the educated speech of the profound murmur of older voices, of 'Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, the spouse of God Vishnu, who was the Protector of Creatures'. It is the members of the middle class who are psychologically more active, in whom consciousness is more vivid and harrowing, that Narayan chooses for his heroes—modest, unselfconfident heroes, it is true. They have some room for independent, critical existence; but there is always a tension between this and that deep source of power, the family where the women rather than the old represent 'Custom and Reason' and know 'what is and what is not proper'. The family indeed is the immediate context in which the novelist's sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated—that of son and parents and brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*, of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father

and son in *The Financial Expert*, of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma*.

It is against the presence of the town; firmly and freshly evoked, and amid a net of family relationships, each thread of which is finely and clearly elaborated, that Narayan's heroes engage in their characteristic struggles. The conditions of the struggle vary from novel to novel, the stress is highly particularised, the protagonist may be a student, a teacher, a financial expert, a fighter for emancipation. One still discerns beneath the diversity a common pattern, or predicament. What is so attractive about it is the charm and authenticity of its Indian colouring; what makes it immediately recognisable is that it seems to belong to a substantial human nature. The primary aim of all these characters is to achieve, in the words of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*, 'a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics'. (The 'distracting illusions' are in the Indian tradition; the freedom from 'hysterics' is the cool qualification introduced by Narayan. The complete phrase suggests the subdued association of seriousness and comedy which distinguishes the tone of these novels.) At first the intention is obscure, buried under the habits of ordinary life, personal responsibilities and—since this is India—a heavy, inherited burden. The novels plot the rise of this intention into awareness, its recognition in a crisis of consciousness, and then its resolution, or resolutions, since there are more often than not several mistaken or frustrated efforts at a resolution.

This theme—it doesn't seem extravagant to call it the aspiration towards spiritual maturity—is sustained throughout Narayan's work. Clearly it is one with its own special dangers. How easily it could slide into formlessness or puff itself into grandiosity. It is a remarkable achievement—given such a theme and an Indian setting—that Narayan's work is singularly free of pretentiousness. A cool sympathy, a highly developed sense of human discrepancy, a rare feeling for the importance and the density of objects—these check any straining after undue significance or any tendency to lapse into a search for large truths about life. In particular each stage of the impulse towards maturity is



defined with meticulous accuracy in minutely specified circumstances, so that the reader is left not with a vague scheme of some dialectical progress but the conviction of an individual living his chequered, stumbling life. Let me give an illustration of this. Here is an example of one of these young men—it is Krishna and it occurs on the first page of *The English Teacher*—at the beginning of his development when what I have called the impulse or aspiration is still too dim to be recognised and when it simply produces vague feelings of dissatisfaction and irritable moods of brooding and analysis:

The urge had been upon me for some days past to take myself in hand. What was wrong with me? I couldn't say, some sort of vague disaffection, a self-rebellion I might call it. The feeling again and again came upon me that as I was nearing thirty I should cease to live like a cow (perhaps a cow, with justice, might feel hurt at the comparison), eating, working in a manner of speaking, walking, talking, etc.—all done to perfection, I was sure, but always leaving behind a sense of something missing.

The same mild hopelessness, the same domestic accidie, is to be seen in Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath*, a man so bogged down in indecision that 'the question of a career seemed to him as embarrassing as a physiological detail':

Agriculture, apprenticeship in a bank, teaching, law—he gave everything a trial once, but with every passing month he felt the excruciating pain of losing time. The passage of time depressed him. The ruthlessness with which it flowed on—a swift and continuous movement; his own feeling of letting it go helplessly, of engaging all his hours in a trivial round of actions, at home and outside.

It is present in the lighter, less formed character of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*:

Chandran emerged from the Professor's room with his head bowed in thought. He felt a slight distaste for himself as a secretary. He felt that he was on the verge of losing his personality.

Even in *The Guide*, Narayan's most complex novel, where the lines of development and of narrative are folded in subtler convolutions, one comes across this feeling of being lost in a pointless, endless routine, although here it is expressed in the nervier, more sophisticated manner proper to this 'advanced' character:

But I was becoming nervous and sensitive and full of anxieties in various ways.

Suppose, suppose—suppose? What? I myself could not specify. I was becoming fear-ridden. I couldn't even sort out my worries properly. I was in a jumble.

The issue from this malaise comes about through some critical event which precipitates a crisis of consciousness and a new effort of will. In *The English Teacher* the event is the illness and death of Krishna's wife, but more often it is a meeting or a series of meetings. The meetings may be disconcerting or terrifying, bewildering or exalting. In *The Financial Expert*, Margayya, perhaps Narayan's most brilliant single comic creation, gradually realises his desire for a life 'freed from illusions' (but for him this means ironically a life dedicated to the cult of money—not money which with gross simplicity is spent across the counter of a shop but money as a beautiful, living force) in a series of encounters: first with Arul Dass, the dignified peon of the Co-operative Bank who shows up Margayya's utter insignificance, then with the strangely impressive priest in the seedy temple who rehearses him in rituals for propitiating the Goddess of Wealth, then with Dr. Pal, 'journalist, correspondent and author', whose 'sociological' work, *Bed Life*, (later changed to *Domestic Harmony*) combining the Kama-Sutra with Havelock Ellis eventually makes Margayya's fortune, and finally with Mr. Lal, the large, astute, but fundamentally uncomprehending businessman. The effect of these meetings, the effect of Sriram's exalting meeting with Gandhi in *Waiting for the Mahatma* or Chandran's baffling meeting with the middle-aged rake in Madras in *The Bachelor of Arts*, is to wake the character from 'an age-old somnolence', from what he now sees to have been his illusory and hysterical past and to determine him wholly in favour of a completely new life.

If the analysis of the subject's struggle to extricate himself from the habitual, dreamy automatism of his past—and in a country like India where the influence of the given is so powerful, the severity of the effort required must be arduous and intense—if this shows Narayan's gift for serious moral analysis, then the various solutions adopted by his *personae* in the search for another, more conscious life, exhibit his remarkable comic talent. (Not of

course that the fiction offers a neatly logical division just like this. The serious and the comic flow in and out of one another throughout in an intricate, inseparable alliance.) Tracts of human experience are looked at with an affectionately ridiculing eye, and with that kind of humour in which the jokes are also a species of moral insight. Such treatment brings out the note of the bizarre, of human queerness, in the activities of many sorts of people, business men, printers, teachers, holy men, press agents, money-lenders. At our most commonplace we are all exotic if scrutinised by a fresh eye. The range is impressive but it has to be said that it follows naturally on Narayan's reading of the key experience at the heart of his novels. Since it was a meeting, the intervention of human difference, human otherness, into the hero's narcissistic world which first shattered it for him, he feels in response that he has to break out of his solipsistic circle into a novel, even a deliberately alien, field of action. To evoke so much variety with such casual, convincing authority and to make it also organic and functional testify to a notable and original talent.

Sometimes these solutions end in a moment of illumination like Krishna's vision of his dead wife in *The English Teacher*, 'a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death', or in a total reversal like Margayya's bankruptcy, or even for Raju in *The Guide* in death. Often they show a character now more solid yet also more conscious, more finished yet more sensitive, accepting, though with misgivings and backslidings, the responsibilities of ordinary life. Always they conclude on a note of acceptance. The following lines towards the end of *Waiting for the Mahatma* convey the feeling although usually it is quieter and more implicit than this:

For the first time these many months and years he had a free and happy mind, a mind without friction and sorrow of any kind. No hankering for a future or regret for a past. This was the first time in his life that he was completely at peace with himself, satisfied profoundly with existence itself. The very fact that one was breathing, feeling and seeing seemed sufficient matter for satisfaction now.

'Accepting' indeed, is the word which best defines his attitude,

not just here but Narayan's attitude generally in the face of his experience. 'Welcome' would be too shrill and hearty, 'resignation' too passive and submissive. In any case his attitude is too nimble with irony for one or the other. And that irony, it should be noted, is an irony of recognition, not an irony of correction.

Perhaps irony is too sharp a word for the calm scrutiny turned on these ardent young men and earnest old ones. Irony has a social reference and the characters in these novels seem to be tested against something deeper than conscious, formulated standards. And irony is in place in the presence of corruption, but all these people, even the seedy, the stupid and the vain, retain what Lawrence called 'a peculiar, nuclear innocence'. The naïveté of being human: that is the daring subject of this decidedly self-effacing writer.

For Narayan is not a pushing or intrusive novelist. He has no anxiety to be tugging at our sleeve or to be giving us a knowing look. He has no message, no doctrine. The half-baked is not an item in his diet. The acceptance of life which his art expresses has no doubt a root in the national condition. One feels that a more than individual sensibility, more than simply personal categories and feelings, are operating under the surface. But his acceptance, a kind of piety towards existence, isn't simply an inherited temperament with its corresponding technique of passive reflection. It is something which has to be worked towards, grown up to, gradually matured. Nor is it—as I mean to imply by calling it 'piety'—in any way rapt or mystical but altogether homely and human. It includes delight in the expressive variety of life, cognisance of its absurdities, mockery at its pretensions and acknowledgement of its difficulties. And like other kinds of piety, other sorts of tradition, it tends to focus itself in objects. Objects become hallowed with more than their own nature and invested with singular and lasting importance. This appreciation of the weight, the form, the value of *things* is both a feature of the temperament sustained throughout these novels and a device of the art employed in their construction. It pins down and solidifies the lightness and fluency of a manner that might otherwise be



too evasive, too 'spiritual'. The effect of Krishna's clock, of his father's 'steel pen with a fat green wooden handle' and his ink made up by hand in a careful, yearly ceremony, or Sriram's teak and canvas chair, is to help to enclose the souls of these people in flesh, pitted, worn and ordinary flesh. Here is an example of this particularising power of objects at work, a passage from *Mr. Sampath* which gives a new meaning to the words, 'an object of sentimental value':

He prayed for a moment before a small image of Nataraja which his grandmother had given him when he was a boy. This was one of the possessions he had valued most for years. It seemed to be a refuge from the oppression of time. It was of sandal wood, which had deepened a darker shade with years, just four inches high. The carving represented Nataraja with one foot raised and one foot pressing down a demon, his four arms outstretched, with his hair flying, the eyes rapt in contemplation, an exquisitely poised figure. His grandmother had given it to him on his eighth birthday. She had got it from her father, who discovered it in a packet of saffron they had brought from the shop on a certain day. It had never left Srinivas since that birthday. It was on his own table at home, or in the hostel, wherever he might be. It had become part of him, the little image. He often sat before it, contemplated its proportions and addressed it thus: 'Oh, God, you are trampling a demon under your foot, and you show us a rhythm, though you appear to be still. May a ray of that light illumine my mind.' He silently addressed it thus. He never started his day without spending a few minutes before this image.

The permanence of objects makes them a protection against the oppression of time. Clearly the direct reference here is to the Indian scene, to the hard agricultural tradition, the vast distances, the ruthless climate, the terrible poverty. But it seems to me to have as well, like so much in Narayan's writing, a measure of the wider validity that belongs to genuine works of art—the universal imprisoned but visible in the particular. In utterly different conditions, where nobody's grandmother could have handed down an image of Nataraja discovered by her father in a packet of saffron, we are probably like Srinivas and 'grasp the symbol but vaguely'. And yet as we contemplate its proportions we are not, I think, deceived in detecting through all the appearances of stillness and strangeness a rhythm, the common and extraordinary rhythm of life.

## Notes on Contributors

G. WILSON KNIGHT was educated at Dulwich College and St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. He was Chancellors' Professor of English at Trinity College, University of Toronto, from 1931-40, Master at Stowe School from 1941-46, and was appointed to the University of Leeds, first as Reader, later as Professor. His publications include work on Shakespearian interpretations, as well as on Pope, Milton, Byron, and the other Romantic poets. His comprehensive work on British drama, *The Golden Labyrinth*, will appear shortly.

GUSTAV CROSS, a graduate of Dublin University, is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, University of Sydney. He formerly worked at Adelaide and Grahamstown. His full length study of Marston is about to appear, and he is at present working on other seventeenth-century dramatists.

RICHARD WEBER has published two works, *The Time Being* and *O'Reilly: poems*. He has worked as an assistant in a scholars' library, a welfare officer, an assistant editor. He is now writing a novel-length poem, called *Twenty Centuries*.

LAURENCE LERNER lectures in English at Queen's University, Belfast, has spent the academic year 1960-61 as Visiting Professor in the United States, under the John Hay Whitney Foundation. His last book was *The Truest Poetry*, published in 1960, and his next will probably be a novel.

MALCOLM LOWRY was the author of *Under the Volcano*; various posthumous stories of his are now appearing in literary journals; and translations of his work are being published in France, Italy, Portugal and Poland.

C. L. BARBER, a graduate of Cambridge and Gothenburg, is a lecturer in the Department of English Literature at the University of Leeds. He formerly held posts at a London grammar school, at the University of Gothenburg, and at the Queen's University, Belfast. His publications include a book on the idea of honour in seventeenth-century drama.

J. B. BAMBOROUGH is Fellow and Senior Tutor of Wadham College, Oxford, University Lecturer in English, and Chairman of the English Faculty. He has recently been appointed Principal of Linacre House, a new Society of men and women graduates in Oxford which is to open in 1962. His publications include *The Little World of Man* (1953), *Ben Jonson* (1959), and an edition of Walter Pope's *Life of Seth Ward* (1961).

E. M. W. TILLYARD, who has recently ceased to be Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, has been associated with English studies at Cambridge University since 1919. He has written on Milton, the Elizabethan world picture, Shakespeare, the English epic with its classical and European background and its extension into the English novel, and on the history of English Studies at Cambridge.

J. SWART was for some ten years the editorial secretary to *Neophilologus*, the Dutch modern language quarterly, to which he contributed papers on Chaucer. He is the author of *Thomas Sackville, a study in Sixteenth Century Poetry*. He is a professor at the University of Amsterdam.

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WILLIAM WALSH is Head of the Department of Education at the University of Leeds. Before coming to Leeds he taught at the University College of North Staffordshire and at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *The Use of Imagination: Educational Thought and the Literary Mind*, published in 1959, and he is at present engaged on a study of literature as a humanity.



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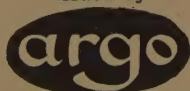
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